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The Evolution of Propaganda

Investigating Online Electioneering in the UK
General Election of 2010

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Abstract

This research project is an analysis of the use of digital propaganda by the three major parties in the UK 2010 General Election. In addition to this empirical aim, the study also employs the discipline of memetics to generate a theoretical and methodological approach with which to study digital propaganda. Memetics is an evolutionary theory of culture based around the concept of the 'meme' or cultural replicator. This study contends that propaganda can be understood as an evolutionary phenomenon, with the ethical implications of its use specifically addressed in each instance, rather than assumed as part of its definition. The memetic 'methodological toolkit' which is used to analyse the data on the 2010 election is a means by which key concepts from within the literature on memetics can be practically deployed. As part of the study this 'toolkit' is presented and the testing of it is continually evaluated in order to improve upon the initial design, something which also has implications for the use of memetic concepts within thematic textual analysis. The election itself was not an 'Internet election' in the way that the 2008 Presidential Election in the USA might be characterised. Such an election can be identified by a convergence of factors from within the party campaign structures and the wider political environment on a specific subject or individual – commonly a candidate for office – resulting in a high degree of spontaneous online participation and organisation amongst citizen supporters. This study argues that the UK 2010 election did not produce such a convergence due to low levels of voter enthusiasm, uneven social and financial resources and an inability by the major parties to capitalise on the potential opportunities for digital campaigning which arose.

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Introduction

This study is intended not only as an exploration of the 2010 UK general election but as a means to evaluate the theoretical and methodological potential of memetic theory for the analysis of propaganda and digital media. These three aims (empirical, theoretical and methodological) form the principal research objectives for this project. The study incorporates material from a selection of disparate disciplines the most prominent of which are memetics, propaganda analysis and digital campaigning (which is more properly a sub-discipline of Political Communications). The initial three chapters address the material from each of these subjects with the overarching objective of outlining the theoretical basis for a memetic theory of propaganda which is deployed and evaluated within the subsequent case study. These three literature review chapters are followed by a dedicated methodology chapter outlining what is referred to as the memetic 'methodological toolkit', a selection of qualitative analytical tools to be deployed (and evaluated) throughout the subsequent case study.

Chapters 5 to 8 take a closer look at digital propaganda in the 2010 UK general election, specifically addressing political party homepages, viral (and not so viral) digital communication and the use of Facebook by the three main parties that contested the election. These chapters are intended to analyse and evaluate both the election itself, via the analytical corpora detailed in chapter 4, and also the methodological and theoretical material introduced in the first four chapters. The case study portion of the thesis is followed by a wider discussion of digital propaganda, memetics and democracy in chapter 9, intended to contextualise both empirical and theoretical work from the previous chapters within an ethical framework. Although this thesis will challenge the assumption that propaganda is necessarily a political evil, it will also maintain that it can be used for deceptive and manipulative purposes and thus its use should be subject to ethical scrutiny. The final chapter will present an overview of each of the three research aims, theoretical, methodological and empirical, along with suggestions for further research.

Theory: Memetics, propaganda and digital communication

Memetics is an evolutionary theory of culture originally proposed by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 publication *The Selfish Gene*. His intention was to place his explanation of biological evolution into a broader context and his words "cut the gene down to size" (Dawkins, 2006b:323). His genetic argument describes the gene as a replicator or 'self-replicating unit of information', Dawkins (2006b) contends that in order to have an evolutionary process all that is necessary is the presence of units of information which can create accurate copies of themselves, that these units occasionally exhibit

variation and for those replicators to exist in a relationship of competition with each other for the resources they need to replicate. This is the process which Dennett (1996) referred to as the 'evolutionary algorithm'. Dawkins went on to suggest that whilst the gene was an obvious candidate for a replicator, there was nothing to suggest that other types of replicator should not arise elsewhere in the universe, and if so, they too could give rise to a process of evolutionary change and the associated cumulative selection which allows for the generation of the non-random complexity associated with the biosphere. Dawkins coined the term 'meme' to describe this cultural replicator, which he characterised as a unit of cultural data capable of replication and variation, which could thus give rise to a form of cultural evolution.

After Dawkins initial coinage of the term 'meme' there was a gradual increase in academic and journalistic circles in the notion of memetic cultural evolution (see notes of 30th anniversary edition Dawkins, 2006b), this was especially notable throughout the 1990s and early 2000s when pop-science publications such as Richard Brodie's (2009) *Virus of the Mind* and Aaron Lynch's (1996) *Thought Contagion* were first published. Within the academy there was also a dedicated journal, *The Journal of Memetics - Evolutionary Models of Information Transmission*, which continued to publish until 2005. However this approach to memetic analysis was plagued by hostility from both its sociobiological predecessors (Dawkins (2006b) notes that many of his peers criticised the elevation of culture at the expense of genetic explanations for human behaviour), and more cultural fields such as anthropology, where some thinkers appeared hostile to a perceived encroachment by biological science into areas traditionally associated with their discipline (Kuper, 2000, Sperber, 2000). As a consequence of this, and the insistence of staunch memeticists such as Susan Blackmore, that memetics was not only a valid scientific theory, but an independent scientific discipline, much of the initial debates within memetics revolved around terminological and ontological issues, rather than around empirical research.

By contrast the more recent academic awareness of memetics, which has followed a sustained pop-cultural interest amongst online communities, has focused on a very specific empirically observable phenomenon. The viral spread of cultural information throughout digital communication networks gave rise to the so called 'Internet meme', which has been a staple of online culture for several decades and is subtly different from the 'academic' meme, in that it is defined by the success at which it replicates, rather than its capacity to replicate. Online forums such as The Internet Meme Database (IMD) (2014) have sought to catalogue the generation and spread of a wide variety of Internet memes, whilst a growing number of scholars have addressed Internet memes from a more academic perspective (see for example Shifman, 2012, Shifman and Thelwall, 2009, Weng et al.,

2012, Bauckhage et al., 2013, Rintel, 2013a). Although the term 'Internet meme' is used within this study, the term 'pop-cultural meme' is also introduced to differentiate this category of meme from the 'academic' meme previously discussed. This is because it is notable throughout both the academic research and the information compiled by online forums such as the IMD that so called 'Internet' memes are not restricted to digital environments and can in fact exist across multiple media and be physically manifest offline. This is of particular importance in the political manifestations of the pop-cultural meme and the relationship between the meme as a form of communication and the physical occupation of public space – a matter discussed in more detail by Paolo Gerbaudo (2012) and Paul Mason (2013) in their respective analyses of contemporary protest movements.

Fundamental to the foundation of memetic theory is the notion of the propagation of information. A meme in the academic sense can be any form of cultural data provided it is possible to replicate it as a coherent unit whilst pop-cultural memes must replicate successfully many times before achieving meme status; however both types of meme are characterised by propagation throughout the cultural meme-pool. Therefore as a theoretical approach, memetics has an obvious potential for the analysis of propaganda, a concept which is also principally concerned with propagation, specifically the propagation of ideas and actions throughout the body politic. The memetic theory of propaganda considers the concept as an evolutionary phenomenon, arguing that its changeable nature, may provide one possible reason for the difficulties which scholars have encountered when trying to define it (see O'Shaughnessy, 2004). The memetic approach argues that the definition of propaganda has frequently focused on the techniques used to facilitate the propagation of political ideas, something which can be found in material as diverse as Nicholas J. O'Shaughnessy's (2004) *Politics and Propaganda: Weapons of Mass Seduction* and Alfred and Elizabeth Lee's (1939) *The Fine Art of Propaganda: A Study of Father Coughlin's Speeches*. However, as these techniques can be codified as instructions and replicated as memes, the techniques of propaganda themselves are subject to the evolutionary algorithm and thus may change over time, as well as holding the potential for increased complexity through cumulative selection. In order to focus on this notion of an evolutionary concept of propaganda the memetic theory of propaganda abandons the automatic association between propaganda and deceptive communication, arguing instead for a case by case evaluation of propaganda techniques to judge their ethical worth in the context in which they were deployed.

In the context of digital campaign propaganda, the most significant technique (or family of techniques) discussed in the literature review is the 'copy me' approach. This involves the replication

of policy ideas, branding or slogans - often (but not necessarily) generated by a professional propagandist - through a network of individual supporters. In keeping with the memetic marketing theories propounded by Tom Roach (2006), these techniques allow initial ideas and arguments to evolve and adapt to the environment in which they are replicating. It also allows the professional public relations operatives associated with contemporary political campaigns (Norris, 2000) to take a less conspicuous role, promoting a (potentially deceptive) impression of grassroots campaigning and a devolved and decentralised power structure. This approach has evolved in tandem with the rise of Social Networking Applications (SNAs) such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter which are designed to facilitate peer to peer communication.

Chapter 3 addresses the evolution of digital approaches to political communication in an attempt to incorporate this literature into the memetic theory of propaganda. This chapter focuses on the historical development of digital campaigning in the United Kingdom and the United States. These countries were chosen for this focus because of the USA's trend setting role in terms of the incorporation of digital technology into campaigns, and the relevance of the UK material to the case study. In keeping with the evolutionary approach, this chapter will argue that the emergence of the 'copy me' method of campaigning was the result of cumulative selection throughout multiple election cycles in which the potential uses of online media were explored by different political parties. Initial issues, such as the low proliferation of technology and shallow engagement by campaign staff, highlight the gradual adaptation to the medium which is arguably still underway – especially within the UK political establishment. This has involved finding ways in which common attributes of digital media – for example the tendency of party websites to attract supporters rather than swing voters (Norris, 2003) – could be utilised to the advantage of a campaign rather than being presented as arguments against the medium's utility. Ultimately, it is argued, this has resulted in a hybridised campaign structure where communications responsibilities are dispersed throughout a wide network of volunteers and supporters, but the main branding and policy functions are highly centralised and internally controlled by the campaign or party hierarchy. Ideally this allows campaigners to take advantage of the diverse, adaptive potential of their online support base, allowing volunteers to create and distribute propaganda for a campaign which is targeted specifically at their own peer groups. However this requires a highly enthusiastic and dedicated contingent of supporters for a given candidate – a matter which would become a problem for Labour in the 2010 election – and the capacity to channel that energy strategically, in order to successfully secure an electoral victory - an issue which would prove difficult for the Liberal Democrats. As a consequence, whilst established techniques of digital propaganda are beginning to emerge, the successful Internet campaign is still very much a matter of the convergence of political, structural and technological

factors. In memetic terms it is a synthesis between a campaign's memes and the environment in which they replicate.

Methodology: Qualitative memetics and the 'toolkit' approach

The memetic theory outlined in the initial chapters of this study is intended to provide an overarching theoretical framework within which to address the subject of propaganda. However it is the aim of this project to not only to produce a theoretical perspective, but also to actualise it into a methodological approach with which to undertake empirical research. In order to do this effectively within the 2010 election case study, Chapter 4 will provide a memetic 'methodological toolkit'; this will operationalise a selection of memetic concepts introduced within the literature review into analytical tools with which to address the 2010 election. The intention will be to produce a methodological approach which can be applied throughout the empirical portion of the case study (principally Chapters 6-8). The evaluation of this methodological approach is also one of the three key research aims of this study. Chapter 4 will initially lay out the various corpora available for analysis which includes copies of party homepages and social networking sites for a wide variety of major and minor UK parties as well as regional ones. For reasons of space the analytical corpora will be restricted to the three most prominent national parties; The Conservatives, Labour and The Liberal Democrats. It will also address some of the issues encountered in the process of data gathering and the difficulties in doing historical digital research.

The methodology itself is based in a thematic qualitative approach, which draws on aspects of Jager and Maier's (2009) work on textual analysis as well as the work of Gunther Kress and Thomas Lindolf (Kress and Leeuwen, 2001, Lindolf and Taylor, 2002, Kress, 2010). As much of the memetic work undertaken in recent years (Weng et al., 2012, Bauckhage et al., 2013) and some of the more traditional additions to the discipline (Delius, 1989, Delius, 1991, Cloak, 1975, Conte, 2000) have taken a quantitative, positivistic methodological approach, it was useful to ground the methodological toolkit in a discipline which is more conducive to the analysis of subjective social phenomena such as political propaganda. The methodology itself functions by presenting the researcher with a list of six analytical 'tools', each focused on a specific aspect of memetic theory. This allows the methodology to function simultaneously as a means to analyse the data from the analytic corpus, and a means to evaluate the utility of the memetic concepts which are being used to analyse it.

As part of the methodological aim of this research project the case study will be seen as a means to utilise and evaluate the memetic methodological toolkit and also to refine it as a consequence of that evaluation, including the addition or subtraction of individual 'tools' as determined by the

direction of the analysis and the research question. The rationale behind the 'toolkit' approach is the intention to produce a methodology which is highly adaptable to different research projects and which can be easily combined with other methodological approaches where necessary. This is in comparison to, for example, Mike Thelwall's (2011) memetic approach to Webometric Analysis, which provides a thorough and systematic methodology for the analysis of online memetic evolution, but is restrictive in the sense that it primarily addresses the Internet meme, as opposed to the pop-cultural meme more generally, or the wider academic meme and places very specific requirements in terms of the timescale allowed for data gathering.

Case Study: The 2010 UK election

The case study portion of this project focuses on the use of digital media by the three major UK parties (Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives) throughout the period 1st March – 11th May 2010. This timescale was chosen specifically to slightly exceed the period of the short campaign which began in April when the election was called and continues beyond the election itself to the 11th May when the formation of the coalition government was announced. This allows for the inclusion of reactions to these key events to be included in the analysis as well as a comprehensive investigation of the short campaign itself.

The case study is divided into four chapters, the first providing a general overview of the election and the subsequent three addressing different aspects of the digital campaign. Chapter 5 provides background information on the election including polling data on the three major parties, information about party finance and an evaluation of contextual factors such as the economic situation (particularly in light of the 2008 economic collapse which hit the UK after the failure of the bank Northern Rock in 2007) and the MPs' expenses scandal. It also looks at the role of the televised leaders' debates which dominated the news cycle throughout the election period. Memetically the purpose of this chapter is to provide some context in terms of the kind of memetic environment in which campaign memes – including memes of propaganda and techniques of propaganda – were replicating during the 2010 election. It argues that the environment was principally one of scandal, economic uncertainty and anti-politics, factors which have major implications for those conducting a digital campaign as they rely principally on an engaged and enthusiastic supporter base.

Chapter 6 is the first empirical chapter; it analyses the official websites and in of the three major parties with a particular focus on the homepages. It explores both the position of the webpage and website within the context of memetic propaganda theory, and the techniques of propaganda deployed within the party homepages. It also provides the first opportunity to implement the methodological toolkit outlined in Chapter 4. The theoretical application of memetic concepts which

is consistent throughout the earlier chapters is also maintained. Chapter 6 begins with an analysis of the Homepage in relation to memetic concepts such as meme, memplex and vehicle which are explored in detail within the literature review, as well as an investigation into the nature of the homepage within the broader network of the Web. Propaganda techniques in this field such as search optimisation and Google's 'sponsored links' are also discussed. In addition this chapter provides a close, thematic analysis of each of the major party homepages addressing issues such as the effective/ineffective replication of US digital propaganda techniques, the impact of party finance on digital campaigning and the use of potentially deceptive or manipulative online propaganda. The chapter concludes with a thorough evaluation of each of the 'tools' from the methodological toolkit as part of the stated aim to refine these methods throughout the study.

Chapter 7 focuses on social networking and pop-cultural memes, first by examining the public interactions with SNAs over the course of the analysis period and evaluating the three principal social networks (Facebook, YouTube and Twitter) as memetic environments. This allows for the continued development of an additional 'memetic environment' methodological tool initially suggested in Chapter 6. Secondly this chapter looks more closely at specific pop-cultural memes which gained popularity during the election and had a propagandistic element with respect to the major parties. This focus on pop-cultural memes includes an analysis of the relationship between satire and propaganda, given the satirical implications of memes such as the *mydavidcameron.com*¹ parody campaign posters, and the hashtag <#nickleggsfault>². It also addresses the less comical but still prolific 'I agree with Nick' meme and its interaction with the official Liberal Democrat campaign and the Conservatives' YouTube channel *WebCameron*, which produced some strong viral videos but did not provoke the re-creation or publically driven evolution of their brand. Arguably the most noticeable pattern which emerges from this analysis is the convergence of media into a 'call/response' motif which has been previously observed in less political studies on Internet memes (see Shifman and Thelwall, 2009). An event which largely exists within a more traditional medium such as television or the press sparks an online response from the public. In the case of the leaders' debates this meant an increased interest in the Liberal Democrat social media pages, in the case of *mydavidcameron.com* this meant an extended campaign of satirical commentary which in turn provokes further responses from within the political establishment. Chapter 7 also continues the development of an additional memetic methodological tool focusing on the analysis of the environmental factors which influence memetic replication.

¹ Please note this is a website title not a URL.

² All hashtags in this study (#) are specifically related to Twitter.

Chapter 8 is the final empirical chapter in the case study; it takes a closer look at the parties' use of Facebook as well as continuing to develop the memetic methodological toolkit. This includes an analysis of the rate of interaction with the parties' Facebook pages by both political insiders and members of the general public. The purpose of this analysis will be to assess the extent to which these pages existed as an additional vehicle for top-down communication, or if there is any evidence to suggest that horizontal communication and self-organisation between citizens was also taking place.

In light of previous observations about the online responses to offline events, there will also be a discussion of the audience and party responses to the leaders' debates. This will include both party organised attempts to steer and capitalise on the discussion, as well as citizen initiated debates and responses. Noting the convergence between the wider media events surrounding the debates and the organisation of supporters on Facebook, the chapter will take a broader look at the issue of 'citizen generated propaganda' (see [Sparkes-Vian as] Vian, 2011) something which will be introduced as part of the memetic theory of propaganda and is of particular relevance to the digital campaign. This will lead to an analysis of 'trolling' and 'flaming' by individuals within Facebook, arguing that they can be seen to constitute a differential form of censorship, i.e. the memes produced by 'trolls' or 'flamers' replicate at the expense of other alternative memes, effectively prohibiting memetic replication in a way comparable to traditional top-down censorship. The evidence for this can be found within the data collected in Corpus B as laid out in detail in Chapter 4.

Memetics, democracy and propaganda

The final chapter of this case study is intended to examine the implications which the empirical and theoretical work undertaken in this project may have for the understanding of the relationship between propaganda and democracy. First this addresses democracy as an ideal – a notion which holds more than a little propagandistic weight – and as a set of institutional mechanisms, less perfect in practice than as a rhetorical idea. Having set up these two notions as an appropriate set of ethical standards by which to judge the use of propaganda within an election campaign the chapter will move on to evaluate memetic propaganda and democracy in light of key themes raised within the main body of the case study such as networks and hierarchies, citizen generated propaganda and citizen initiated censorship. It will also look more closely at the use of Internet and pop-cultural memes as propaganda tools by recent revolutionary and protest movements such as those involved in the Arab Spring and Occupy.

The focus of this research is on the 2010 UK general election but it is also intended to provide the beginnings of a theory of propaganda which can be applied universally, for example further research

in this vein could address non-state actors, democratic and non-democratic nations or different periods of history. Arguably the absence of a full and comprehensive understanding of propaganda and the reluctance of the academy to seriously address the concept is damaging, not only to the body of academic knowledge but to the broader public and our collective discourse as citizens within a representative democracy. The conclusion of the evolutionary theory of propaganda presented in this work is that with each political, social and technological development, new means by which ideas can be propagated will spread. The techniques which facilitate that spread, the understanding of what they are and how to implement them, represent a significant source of political power. In the context of digital propaganda there is the potential that some of that power may be distributed more widely amongst the citizenry than has been the case in previous eras. Whilst it is consistently argued within this thesis that propaganda is not an 'evil' force, it will also be contended that a power which is poorly understood has the potential to be extremely dangerous. For the possible democratic power implicit within some of the contemporary techniques of propaganda to be realised, not only academic researchers but the wider citizenry need to be aware of them, to understand them and if necessary be able to deploy them for the causes which they consider important.

Chapter One: Introducing Memetics

Memetics is a theory of cultural evolution whose origins lie in the world of popular science, specifically in Richard Dawkins' 1976 publication *The Selfish Gene* (2006b)³, although versions of the theory occurred prior to and independently of Dawkins' coinage of the term 'meme'. Memes are units of culture which replicate from person to person as people imitate each other via ordinary speech and action. Any cultural item which can be copied as a single unit can be considered a meme, examples include stories, songs, jokes, images, icons, rituals and, (for some scholars) artefacts. Memetics proposes a theory of cultural evolution which runs in tandem with genetic evolution and explicitly rejects genetic determinism; the processes of Darwinian natural selection which created human bodies and with them human brains let loose a second evolutionary process which is derived from, but is not subservient to the first.

The principal aim of this chapter is to introduce a set of memetic concepts which can then be evaluated throughout the course of this research. Evaluating the utility of memetics as analytical and methodological framework for understanding both propaganda and online communication are key research aims for this thesis and will be discussed in detail throughout the study. Given that memetics is a relatively obscure discipline it seems reasonable to provide a certain amount of historical and theoretical context before discussing the key debates within the theory itself. The first section of this chapter will therefore address the relationship between memetics and sociobiology and memetics and mimetics. The second section entitled *Critics and Controversies* will address the key issues within memetics itself as well as dealing with some of the criticisms levelled at it. The third section will address memes in popular culture, focusing on the role they play within Internet communities and recent protest movements, seeking to relate this more populist understanding of the meme to the theoretical material generated by memetics as an academic discipline.

Memetics, mimetics and sociobiology

The purpose of this section is not to review the literature within either sociobiology or mimetics and has no pretensions towards presenting anything but a flavour of those disciplines. Its purpose is to explain where memetics stands in relation to these two more familiar areas of theory in order to provide context for later discussions about memetics itself. The literature it seeks to evaluate therefore is largely from within memetics with some additional supporting material from other disciplines such as anthropology.

³ Additional chapters and notes have been added to the 2006 version referenced throughout this project.

The philosopher Daniel Dennett (1996) described evolution as algorithmic, a process of immense complexity and splendour which nevertheless could be broken down into vast collections of basic interacting components simple enough to be performed by a machine. As a philosophical idea, he claimed, it has the properties of a 'universal acid', capable of burning through many of our most deeply cherished ideas about humanity. According to Dennett, it is a fear of this 'universal acid' which can best explain the hostility exhibited by some theorists towards any attempt to incorporate Darwinian Theory into the study of human culture. Memetics is such a theory and has a direct past within sociobiology, a discipline so maligned within the humanities that it has become essentially a pejorative term, all but synonymous with the worst extremes of biological determinism (see Dawkins, 2006b, Dennett, 1996 for a detailed discussion of this perspective). This relationship with sociobiology can potentially account for memetics' own lack of popularity within the social sciences. The publication of E. O Wilson's famous *Sociobiology* in 1975 was followed by a storm of criticism, led in part by the leftist group *Science for the People*⁴. This included allegations that racist and sexist assumptions were being smuggled into theory under the guise of scientific neutrality, that it provided a spurious biological rationale for a culturally specific strain of Western capitalism and that it reduced all human action to genetics without due consideration of culture (Sahlins, 1977, Bloch, 2000, for counter argument see Wilson, 1978).

Memetics is not sociobiology, and it is not the purpose of this literature review to address the outcome of this debate or the legitimacy of these criticisms, except in terms of their relevance to memetics. Dennett (1996) has argued that many within sociobiology reacted to the hostility they faced by derisively dismissing their critics as anti-scientific and becoming reluctant to criticise those within their discipline who exaggerated the significance of genetics in relation to human behaviour. Dawkins, he claims, remains an exception to this rule, something which becomes very evident in the final chapter of *The Selfish Gene* where the concept of the meme is first introduced. Dawkins suggests that human beings are unique in their capacity to move beyond their genetic programming thanks to the independence of cultural evolution from genetics, claiming that "we have the power to defy the selfish genes of our birth and, if necessary, the selfish memes of our indoctrination" (2006b:200).

Whilst Dawkins himself is a disciple of sociobiology, memetics opens up the possibility for a theory of culture which remains rooted in the evolutionary principles of variation, competition and cumulative

⁴ The organisation *Science for the People* was an American Marxist group founded in 1969 which opposed the use of science and pseudo-science as a mechanism of oppression. It later became principally identified with a publication of the same name which took a critical, leftist stance on scientific issues. More detail about this group is available in the introduction to Sahlins' (1977) denunciation of sociobiology.

selection, but which gives culture and nature an equal role in the evolutionary process. This is based on the characterisation of the meme as a replicator, defined simply as “anything...of which copies are made”(Dawkins, 1999:83). Dawkins argues that replicators “tend to become the basis for Darwinian evolution...once they arise anywhere in the universe” (2006b:322). Where replicators exist in competition for the resources they need to replicate and exhibit some variation in their nature, those which are best able to utilise the available resources will tend to spread. Replicators by definition exhibit heredity, they build by incremental steps upon the adaptations of previous generations, this is the process which Daniel Dennett (1996) characterised as the ‘evolutionary algorithm’. Within genetics this is a familiar idea; it is what led us from the proverbial ‘primordial soup’ to the vast and complex ecosystem of the contemporary biosphere (2006a).

Memetic theory suggests that culture evolved and continues to evolve because the human ability to imitate – which is uniquely well developed, even in new born infants (see Garrels, 2006 for a review of some of the related literature) – allows for a second evolutionary process following the same basic algorithm. Susan Blackmore (1999, 2008) has argued that this second evolutionary process, far from being necessarily subservient to the first, could in fact have provided a selection pressure on genetic evolution, a concept she refers to as ‘memetic driving’. This, she argues, could be a plausible explanation for the speedy evolutionary reconfiguration of the hominid brain during the transition from *Australopithecus* to modern humans (Blackmore, 1999:74-81).

It is important to emphasise that memetics does not support the idea of what Sahlins (1977) called ‘vulgar sociobiology’ - the idea that genes provide all organisms, including humans with an insurmountable set of rigid instructions which strictly determine behaviour. This is because the second charge levelled against sociobiology - that it covertly smuggles in right wing ideals under the cover of scientific neutrality - appears to follow directly from the idea that genetic programming is somehow unassailable in a way in which environmental or cultural considerations are not. Dawkins (1999) expresses considerable surprise at the extent to which people outside of biology appear to consider genetic characteristics as synonymous with the ‘natural’, unassailable and inevitable.

The idea that genes are somehow ‘super-deterministic’, in comparison with environmental causes, is a myth of extraordinary tenacity...this...was brought home to me in...a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1978. A young woman asked...whether there was any evidence for genetic sex differences in human psychology...[She] seemed to set great store by the answer and was almost in tears...Something or somebody...had misled her into thinking that genetic determination is for keeps; she...believed that a ‘yes’ answer to her question would...condemn her...to a life of feminine pursuits, chained to the nursery and the kitchen sink (ibid:11).

Dawkins points out that any genetic predisposition to behaviour in humans is no more deterministic than the effects of environmental factors, including those of culture which come under the remit of memetic evolution. It can be concluded from this analysis that any statistically significant differences in behaviour between what Castells referred to as the "collective denominations of the subsets of human diversity" (2012:13), such as gender, race or sexuality are non-binding and changeable. This is true irrespective of whether the origins of those differences are biological, with genes as the underlying replicator or cultural, with memes fulfilling that role within the evolutionary algorithm.

Sahlins' argument that "what is inscribed in the theory of sociobiology is the entrenched ideology of Western society: the assurance of its naturalness, and the claim of its inevitability" (1977:101), is similarly dependent on the false assumption that characteristics acquired as a consequence of genetic evolution are 'natural' and 'inevitable'. Memetics directly addresses the issue of cultural marginalisation within sociobiology by treating cultural evolution as a contingent but independent process to biological evolution. Within memetics the relations of Western capitalism may be 'natural' in that they evolved over time as the result of a convergence of historical factors rather than being deliberately designed by some long dead social architect, but there is nothing in memetic thought which suggests that they are inevitable.

Dawkins points out with regret that people have mistakenly assumed that in describing 'selfish' genes he was either suggesting that selfish behaviour was inevitable, or actually advocating it in the manner associated with the neo-liberal extremism of the "new right, which [later] elevated...selfishness to the level of ideology" (Dawkins, 2006b:268). The issue of 'selfishness' and its relationship to human and memetic agency will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Memetically the ideology of capitalism has been very successful at replicating, with some left wing scholars going so far as to describe it as "viral" (Miller and Dinan, 2008:182). What this means from a memetic perspective, is that as an ideology it is very good at spreading within a given socio-political and technological environment. However this does not suggest that as a consequence capitalism is morally superior, or that its spread is either inevitable or conducive to the general good of humanity as a species. In fact several publications within the memetic literature have called into question some of the founding assumptions of the free market logic which Sahlins saw within sociobiology. Joshua Frank (1999) for example, argued that "financial evolution will probably not lead to efficient markets and more likely would result in the dominance of inefficient market strategies". Similarly Vos and Kelleher (2001) argue that the evidence suggests that managers "'finesse' their shareholder wealth maximization responsibilities and instead seek power" which rather than being seen as an end in itself can be understood through a logic of maximising memetic replication. These viewpoints

run directly counter to the ideological position expressed within neo-liberal doctrine which argues that the market mechanism is key to organisational efficiency (see Hay, 2002, Begg et al., 2005).

Some authors such as Paul Mason (2013) and Manuel Castells (2012) who have discussed memes more recently - specifically in relation to contemporary protest movements - have used the term 'mimetic' in conjunction with the word meme, or in relation to viral Internet data where 'memetic' would arguably have been more appropriate. This suggests that a serious area of confusion has formed within the academy and that the differences between these disciplines are worth clarifying.

Mimetics is something of an ambiguous discipline which has included the study of both representation and imitation; the latter is a concept which is central to memetics and the word meme was explicitly derived from the same root as mimetic (Dawkins, 2006b). It is therefore surprising that Susan Blackmore (1999), who prioritises the significance of 'true' imitation (as opposed to contagion or social learning which are less complex forms of copying) should dismiss the relevance of mimetics to memetic study so abruptly, claiming: "[it] sounds as though it might be similar to memetics, but it is not" (ibid:98). She supports this contention by citing the psychologist Merlin Donald, who sees mimesis as a representational, rather than and imitative act, something personal rather than communicative. The ability to perform such acts was for Donald a first step on the way to linguistic and cultural representation whilst memetic imitation is by definition an act of communication.

Donald's explicit distinction between mimesis and imitation is not shared by all those who have studied the subject. In his analysis of the role mimesis has played within semiotics, Timo Maran (2003) places a much greater emphasis on imitation – in particular the imitation of natural phenomena. As a consequence of this broader interpretation of mimetics he views memetics as the offspring of mimetics and "the positivistic tradition of biology" (ibid:197), in that it has taken a more scientific (and in Maran's view more deterministic) approach towards imitation which has also been studied from an interpretive, artistic perspective. One of the three⁵ definitions for mimesis which Maran provides "the deliberate imitation of the behaviour of one group of people by another as a factor in social change" (2003:191), is in fact extremely close to memetics, except that its focus is on the group rather than that which is being copied. Whilst they can be seen to have considerably more in common than admitted by Blackmore, mimetics differs from memetics in terms of scope and focus. As Maran observes: "It is probably not correct to speak of mimesis as a single concept, but

⁵The other two are: a) imitative representation of the real world in art and literature and b) *zoology* mimicry of another animal or plant.

rather as a constantly changing, transforming and as it were 'living' family of concepts" (Maran, 2003:197).

Rene Girard's interpretation of mimetics as outlined by Garrels (2006) seems to have even more in common with memetics in that it seeks to prioritise the human capacity to imitate as a key driver in explaining both individual human development and broader social phenomena – Girard's interests appear to lie in explaining the formation of religions and the role of imitation in social violence and benevolence. Garrels' paper points out that much of the theoretical work done by Girard which urged a greater focus on imitation has since been confirmed by modern neuroscience. What his theory appears to lack (and memetics provides) is the insight that the human capacity to imitate provides us with an additional replicator. Girard's (2004) description of mimetic contagion appears to have as much to do with the transfer of emotional states in situations of mob violence as the replication of cultural units. The kind of imitation (or as Blackmore would describe it, contagion) discussed by Girard is a necessary prerequisite for memetic transmission, and certainly his example could include memes. The formulaic protest chant for example is copied from person to person within a protest and also between protests, but the generalised transmission of emotional states would not be considered sufficiently sophisticated by thinkers such as Blackmore (1999). Also, the description of "communities mimetically transfer[ing] all their hostilities to the single victim" (Girard, 2004:11) could involve private, representational process, of the kind Merlin Douglas describes, as well as communicative ones involving the replication of memes.

What emerges from this brief discussion of sociobiology and mimetics is the impression of memetics as a body of theory which, whilst it has similarities with both of them is also distinct. It escapes the allegations of genetic reductionism levelled at sociobiology by presenting a Darwinian conception of culture based on dual evolutionary processes. This allows culture to be not only a causal factor in human behaviour, but a potential selection pressure which could have influenced our genetic development. It incorporates the emphasis on imitation from mimetics but only in its more complex forms as well as introducing the concept of the secondary replicator from whence the analogy between memes and genes is derived. These are not the only disciplines which have similarities with memetic thought. Maurice Bloch (2000) points for example to the diffusionist school within anthropology, which was concerned with tracking cultural traits as they transferred from one part of the world to another. The similarities between this school and memetics are dealt within Derek Gatherer's (1997) paper on memetics and western philosophical traditions. Sociobiology and mimetics were chosen for introductory comparison first, to allay any residual disciplinary hostility that might result from the association with sociobiology and secondly to avoid any confusion which

might arise from the similarity in both name and subject between memetics and mimetics. Having clarified these points it will now be possible to examine some of the major arguments within memetics itself in more detail.

Critics and controversies

Memetics originated in a book by a prominent scientist. In both his denunciation of organised religion and his passionate advocacy of science, Richard Dawkins is a self-styled representative for science and rationalism. *The Selfish Gene* however is not exactly a work of science, it is a work *about* science, intended to explain complex scientific ideas to people who are not necessarily scientists themselves.

The conceptualisation of the meme as a secondary replicator was a speculative aside in the final chapter of the original publication, his intention in introducing it was to “cut the gene down to size, rather than sculpt a grand theory of human culture” (Dawkins, 2006b:323). The point of memes for Dawkins was to emphasise that the power of the gene is not inherent but derived from its status as a replicator. Given this naissance within popular science, it is unsurprising that the majority of those within memetics viewed it as a new scientific discipline rather than a theoretical paradigm to be applied within existing disciplines (Brodie, 2009, Blackmore, 1999, Dawkins, 2006b, Dennett, 1996, Aunger, 2000a, Maran, 2003). However the positivistic philosophical tradition which Maran (2003) in particular saw as a legacy endowed upon memetics by biology, carries with it a set of objectivist ontological assumptions⁶, specifically the notion of an "external reality existing independently of our conceptions of it" (Hay, 2002:63) which implies a binary distinction between the 'real' and observable and the 'unreal' or false. Within memetics these assumptions relate directly to key questions about the nature of the meme, the extent to which memes can be said to exist (i.e. do they have a 'real' or merely metaphorical existence) and how to locate and identify memes in the field. In addition to uncertainty over the nature and location of the meme, the precise conceptual relationship between meme and gene was never internally resolved within memetics. Partly as a consequence of these difficulties the discipline's only dedicated academic journal, *The Journal of Memetics*, ceased publication in 2005, leading some to suggest that memetics as a project was simply a fad, and one best forgotten (Edmonds, 2005).

⁶ Ontology is here defined using Hay's description of it as relating to "*being*, to what *is*, what *exists*" (2002:61, original emphasis).

As one of the primary causes of hostility towards memetics was the relationship with the sociobiological concept of the 'selfish' gene and the associated questions of human and memetic agency, this section will take a closer look at these issues and will outline in detail how they will be dealt with in this study. Then it will be possible to examine the issues of existence and location with respect to the meme which have proved challenging within memetics as a discipline.

The 'selfishness' metaphor and the questions of memetic and human agency

As already discussed, Richard Dawkins' (2006b) use of the word 'selfish' to describe the actions of replicators has caused considerable confusion. Although, as a consequence of this confusion the issue will be addressed many times throughout the course of this thesis in relation to specific aspects of the theoretical or empirical work, this section will attempt to clearly explain the relationship between this metaphor and the issues of human and memetic agency.

To understand why a meme can be described as 'selfish' it is necessary to understand the nature of the argument which Dawkins' was making about genetic replicators and the nature of the debate within biology at the time *The Selfish Gene* was written. Specifically the characterisation of a gene as 'selfish' was supposed to draw attention to the way in which genes – having no true agency of their own simply the capacity to replicate – do not strive to replicate for the good of either an individual organism or a species as a whole. Having no conscious foresight, and indeed no consciousness of any description, this would be beyond their power. The same can be said of the individual meme, it does not have consciousness, it does not exhibit loyalty and it has no real agency, simply the capacity to replicate. Where there is an opportunity for a replicator of either category to replicate it will do so – that is the one, unifying, defining feature of all replicators. The notion of applying a metaphorical agency to replicators is a methodological technique used by Dawkins (2006b) and by other thinkers such as Dennett (1996, 2003) and Blackmore (1999) to explore the potential avenues for replication which exist for a given replicator at a given time. The characterisation of this agency as the 'selfish' desire to 'exploit' any opportunity for replication is simply a way of highlighting the fact that if a replicator can replicate then it will – with no reference to the impact on other replicators, individuals, groups or even the capacity for future generations of that replicator to replicate effectively at a subsequent point in time. The terminology of selfishness will be used sparingly throughout this thesis specifically to draw attention to tensions between the replication of a specific meme and another consideration – such as the interests of a political party or individual – which are relevant to the analysis. It is hoped that this approach will avoid some of the confusion surrounding the use of such language in the past.

Whilst the agency of the meme (and any other replicator) is firmly a metaphorical, methodological tool, the question of human agency in relation to both genetic and memetic replication is another matter – and one which has caused disagreement amongst memetic scholars. Dawkins (2006b) was explicit about his belief that memetics itself showed the potential for human free will, in particular with respect to their genetic predispositions. He argued that cultural evolution allowed human beings to act against the interests of their genes and even the memes with which they were culturally conditioned. Blackmore (1999) by contrast argued strongly that the entire notion of human free will was an illusion brought on by the existence of what she called the ‘selfplex’ a collection of memes which attached themselves to the notion of the self and thus performed a filtering function with respect to incoming memes, but did not in fact exercise any more meaningful agency than the individual meme. Blackmore’s thoughts on this appear somewhat confused (and even contradictory) in that she denies the possibility of deliberate human action but acknowledges the possibility of intentional propaganda. Therefore this study will take the position expounded by Daniel Dennett (2003, 1996), which argues that free will can be understood as a consequence of an evolved consciousness and thus the existence of human agency is maintained. This position is consistent with both scholars such as Dawkins (2006b) from the ‘classical’ memetic literature and more recent adherents such as Mason (2011) and Gerbaudo (2012) whose interest has focused more on memetics within popular culture and protest.

The questions of location and existence

This section will first address the key issues of location and existence by asking a simple two part question which has proved surprisingly difficult for memeticists to answer: what exactly is a meme and where can it be found? Discussion of these issues will lead on to the debate over whether memes can best be compared to a virus or a gene; an argument which has been spurred on as much by the normative connotations surrounding the term ‘virus’ as by the question of which, if either, is the most appropriate analogy.

The questions of what a meme is and where it resides are intimately connected because a researcher’s conception of the meme will influence the physical (or physiological) location of their sphere of investigation. Correspondingly a researcher with a hypothesis about where ‘real’ memes reside will have a resultant set of expectations about their substance. For example, some thinkers such as Cloak (1975), Delius (1991, 1989), Aunger (2002) and latterly Dawkins (2006b) believe that memes exist within the mind. The actions performed, words spoken and artefacts created and

copied from person to person are the effects of those mental patterns in the world. This fits in with the distinction found in genetics between the gene as the replicator, and its phenotypic effects, the characteristics of an organism which develop as a consequence of the interaction between genetics and the environment. The neurologist Juan Delius (1989) even developed a model of how memes could potentially be distributed in the mind, emphasising this distinction between the meme and its effect, something which Dawkins praised because of its relevance to his own genetic work on extended phenotypes (Dawkins, 2006b:323). As a consequence Dawkins later takes up the distinction originally made by Cloak (1975) between i-culture and m-culture, where i-culture is the meme within the brain and m-culture is the interactions it makes with the outside world (see also Rose, 1998). Aunger (2000b) joins them in this view due to his own scepticism that information could meaningfully exist and be transmitted successfully across a wide variety of physical forms. However Blackmore (1999) disagrees, viewing artefacts and 'mental' memes as equally deserving of the term, along with Kevin Laland and John Odling-Smee (2000) who also argue for the incorporation of the artefact into memetic evolutionary theory.

Kate Distin (2005) suggested that schematic repositories of knowledge such as blueprints, books or information on the Internet can be considered memes whilst specifically excluding artefacts. She makes this argument based on a perspective which sees the analogy between memes and genes as very close. Her analysis includes the identification of direct memetic counterparts for both deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) and alleles (a potential alternative gene to the one present, which could theoretically occupy the same locus on a chromosome). Cultural DNA for Distin is constructed from the mental representations of ideas, actions and artefacts with a meme's alleles being the contextually derived, logically plausible substitutes for a given meme (ibid:54-6). These representations are schematic, allowing for copies to be generated from the information available in the brain. Blueprints and written information is similarly schematic, it provides within it all the information needed in order to make an accurate copy of an artefact.

Artefacts however provide only limited information about their construction, and no means by which an observer could disaggregate the significant features from the irrelevant without bringing additional knowledge to the problem themselves. In such cases, Distin argues, what is going on in the construction of a second artefact is actually a process of re-creation, rather than replication, an argument which Bloch (2000) had previously applied to all cultural traits and advanced as a general criticism of memetics. This perspective resulted in considerable discussion throughout Robert Aunger's (2000a) edited collection *Darwinizing Culture* about the precise nature of 'true' replication and the need for memeticists to demonstrate it. This is arguably one example of the kind of analysis

which led David Hull to observe that “critics of memetics observe standards so high for scientific knowledge that few, if any areas of science can possibly [sic] meet them” (2000:48). The problem with the re-creation argument is the assumption that memetic transmission must be isolated rather than involving the amalgamation and re-combination of memes already existing in the mind. In fact Distin herself acknowledges the significance of such recombination, noting that it is likely to be far more prevalent in memetic evolution than its genetic counterpart (2005:56).

This distinction between replicator and phenotype is vital for biology because characteristics can generally only be passed down through the replicator chain. Any damage or alteration done to a phenotype such as the loss of a limb does not impact upon the gene and cannot be passed on to the next generation. Philip Hunter (2008) dismisses the notion that more recent developments in epigenetics could lead to a resurgence in the long defunct theory of genetic Lamarckianism as a “red herring” on the grounds that, whilst there is evidence that some characteristics acquired during the life span of an organism can be passed on to subsequent generations:

Lamarckism implied that the actions or experiences of an organism could lead to the underlying genes being modified through rewriting of the DNA code. Epigenetic inheritance merely alters the ability of a gene to be expressed in offspring, but leaves the DNA, and the genes, intact. Epigenetic inheritance can readily be reversed, and there is as yet little or no evidence that it persists for longer than a few generations. (ibid)

By contrast, Dawkins argues, memes “may [have] ‘Lamarckian’ causal arrows leading from phenotype to replicator” (1999:112). It is not difficult to construct an example of this distinction by separating a meme as a mental construct from the phenotypic artefact it represents. The Venus de Milo can be considered a memetic phenotype, numerous physical copies of the famous statue have been made as props for the film and television industries, carrying with them the statue’s missing arms – to the layman possibly its most distinguishing feature. The missing arms are the consequence of damage to the phenotype, but their absence is still replicated when the Venus de Milo meme passes into a mind or when a plaster copy of the statue is made.

Blackmore (1999) has argued that the distinction between a meme and its phenotype is inappropriate – the result of adhering too closely to the analogy between gene and meme. Instead she proposes a different distinction, between memes copied via their products such as the example of the Venus de Milo and those copied via a set of instructions such as when following a recipe for soup. Where the meme is a product or artefact which is copied directly, any imperfections or embellishments may be passed along to the next memetic generation. Where a set of instructions are followed and then passed on (Blackmore talks about photocopying the recipe for soup), the

process becomes in Dawkins words “self-normalising” (ibid:xii), neither imperfections nor improvements can be retained through the generations unless an alteration is made to the instructions themselves. Diminishing the importance of this distinction between a meme and its effects allows Blackmore to readily accept the idea of multiple locations for the meme. They can exist just as easily in an object, a set of instructions, or in brains - although she appears to share Dennett’s (1996) view that they must at least originate in the mind.

It should be noted that within memetic theory there is very little to distinguish the physical location of memes in the brain and psychological location in the mind. Both Blackmore (1999) and Dennett (1996, 2003) argue that a conception of the mind as an entity separate to the brain – rather than a description of the subjective experience of having one – lacks scientific credibility despite its persistence in philosophical literature. Blackmore (1999) however does provide some potentially useful insights into the psychology of memetic structures within the brain with respect to the analysis of propaganda. Specifically the notion that complex, self-perpetuating memetic structures (memeplexes) such as those relating to political or religious belief systems, or indeed to the sense of the individual self, might reside in the brain and act as filters, influencing which memes are accepted and internalised, which are replicated and how they are replicated (e.g. as truths or accompanied by scepticism). However, as discussed in the section on human and memetic agency, Blackmore’s thoughts on how the ‘selfplex’ relates to individual agency and free will are confused and at times apparently contradictory and should thus be treated with caution.

The physical substance of an online viral video, a story repeated via oral tradition, a plaster model of an elephant and a newspaper article are clearly very different. A researcher’s position on the location of a meme will effectively determine, or at least heavily influence what they can be made of. That is, if a scholar believes that memes only exist as potentially discernible (but as yet unmapped) patterns within neural networks, their search for the ‘true meme’ will likely take a neurological approach rather than one stemming from Media Studies or Political Communications. This problem is constructed in the literature as an empirical question: if the meme exists it must have substance, if it has substance it can be located, pinned down and subjected to scientific analysis. However it is also a question of utility in terms of the problem that memetics is being used to address. It may be more convenient to use the term meme to refer to competing extracts of text, or to competing policy ideas which are only manifest for analysis outside the brain. Even if such memes should be more rightly thought of as memetic phenotypes, the external manifestations of information within human minds; for the purposes of this study, which takes a series of digital media

files as its analytic corpus, such a perspective arguably adds little except additional jargon and is in any case a premature conclusion without further neurological work to substantiate it.

David Hull (2000), who argues for a more empirically grounded form of memetic scholarship, suggests that it is not in fact necessary to resolve these points in order to conduct memetic investigations, claiming instead that it is the process of conducting memetic research which will lead to a better understanding of exactly what the meme is – and as a consequence where it is. The distinction, whilst it may be vital for a neurologist, is less likely to be of serious consequence to an analysis which has no way of conducting research on memes as they exist in the mind - even audience research is based on externalised information. Coming from a political and Media Studies perspective, it seems that much of this search for a definite form and location for the meme stems from the very strict, objectivist ontological perspective in which there is a stark distinction between the real, observable world and that which is false or imaginary. A version of memetics which sees it as a useful set of conceptual lenses, a perspective not an absolute scientific reality is viewed as tantamount to failure; ironically it is this exact perspective which Dawkins (1999) takes when elaborating on his theory of the extended phenotype. It is in this spirit that this project will seek to follow Hull's advice and "set..about doing memetics"(2000:48). Blackmore's approach, in which the meme is defined as essentially 'whatever is copied' in the process of cultural replication, will therefore be adopted as a practical definition for the academic meme (this is distinct from the Internet or pop-cultural meme discussed later in this chapter) on the grounds that it is the broadest and simplest definition available. These are likely to be useful characteristics given that the subject under investigation is propaganda, which as will be discussed in the Chapter 2, is a topic that occupies uneasy and uncertain moral, definitional and empirical territory.

The 'meme as gene' versus 'meme as germ' debate

Robert Aunger identifies two distinct schools of thought within memetics which he describes as being "a[t] war...with each group claiming the other is retarding progress in memetics" (2002:21). According to Aunger the two groups differ over whether memes can be best understood as analogous to a gene (the 'meme as gene' faction) or as a virus or contagion (the 'meme as germ' faction). Given that both genes and viruses are not only replicators, but replicators written, in the same chemical language, it seems strange to regard them as mutually exclusive categories. The distinction between these schools of thought may be somewhat exaggerated by Aunger, although it is true that many thinkers, both supportive and critical of memetic theory, have warned about the dangers of overplaying the meme/gene analogy (e.g. Dawkins, 1982, Blackmore, 1999, Kuper, 2000, Bloch, 2000) whilst some have warned that the characterisation of memes as 'mind viruses' from

which people need protecting, is a potentially misleading depiction of memetic theory (Dennett, 1996, Blackmore, 2000).

Reasons for regarding the two schools as distinct vary from thinker to thinker. Aunger for example appears to regard the idea of the meme as replicator as a distinctive feature of the meme as gene faction. However, as has already been pointed out, a replicator – although often endowed semantically with a purely metaphorical level of agency – is simply “anything in the universe of which copies are made” (Dawkins, 1999:83). Memes, viruses, prions⁷, plasmids⁸ and genes are all possible examples of replicators. As replicators exhibit reasonably accurate heredity, each generation builds on the substance of the previous one. They are thus the basis for cumulative selection with all its associated powers of design (Dawkins, 2006a). There is no reason aside from their common status as a replicator to assume that memes should act especially like either genes or viruses, or that they should act like one but not the other. There are some relevant distinctions between genes and viruses which it might be worth comparing, although it is vital not to overemphasise either analogy or you risk falling foul of Kuper’s (2000) criticism of memetics, that memeticists tend to examine the behaviour of genes and then draw conclusions about the behaviour of memes because they are assumed to act in the same way. In fact the benefit of comparing memes and genes is less one of arguing that if genes act in a certain way then memes can be expected to as well, and more in that if genes act in a certain way then there is nothing in the fundamental make-up of the replicator which would prohibit memes from doing the same.

Do memes construct vehicles?

Kate Distin, whose work *The Selfish Meme* (2005) takes the meme/gene analogy to a greater extreme than either Blackmore or Dawkins, suggests that the real distinction between a virus and a gene is that genes construct bodies equipped with a system for genetic replication, whereas viruses hijack other replication systems rather than building their own. She argues that in this respect memes in fact act more like viruses, however she also argues for direct memetic variations on specialised genetic concepts such as DNA and alleles, something which Blackmore (1999) – who Aunger identifies as a proponent of the meme as gene school of memetics - is reluctant to do. This suggests that the distinction between the meme as gene and ‘meme as germ’ factions is somewhat less stark than Aunger makes it.

In biology a vehicle is described as:

⁷ A theoretical parasitic replicator advanced as a potential cause of some brain diseases such as CJD.

⁸ A tiny scrap of DNA similar to a virus which can splice itself seamlessly into the genome of an organism.

Any unit, discrete enough to seem worth naming which houses a collection of replicators and which works as a unit for the preservation and propagation of those replicators...a vehicle is not a replicator. A replicator's success is measured by its capacity to survive in the form of copies. A vehicle's success is measured in its capacity to propagate the replicators that ride inside it (Dawkins, 1999:114).

The body of an organism is the vehicle for its genes. To the extent that memes have restructured the human brain to make it a more conducive environment to the storage and replication of memes, the human brain can also be seen as a meme vehicle. The role of memes in structuring the mind is still a matter of debate, however evidence from neurology does suggest a key role for imitation in early development and that the capacity to imitate is innate from very early infancy, suggesting a genetic component to the ability (Garrels, 2006). This corresponds favourably with Blackmore's (1999, 2008) argument that the human mind has been structured by meme-gene co-evolution, with the replication of memes exerting a selection pressure in favour of better and better imitation on our hominid ancestors. As the process of socialisation in early childhood also involves a high degree of imitation, it too can be seen as memetic (Garrels, 2006). However, following Distin's viral argument, there is a sense in which this memetic vehicle construction is more parasitic (or symbiotic) on a gene vehicle (the human body) rather than the construction of a vehicle of its own.

Blackmore argues against the incorporation of artefacts under the 'vehicle' title; Dennett's inclusion of a wheel in this category because it "carries the idea of...a wheel from mind to mind" (1996:348) is thus rejected. Kate Distin suggests that this is an over literal interpretation of the word 'vehicle', the distinctive feature of which is not that it carries a replicator around from place to place but that it is constructed by its replicators to facilitate their replication (2005:79) and as Blackmore notes, non-schematic artefacts such as wheels do not house a collection of replicators which they protect and seek to promote. She acknowledges that books, which Distin also allows as 'schematic' memes which exist outside of the brain, might form a better example. Blackmore also suggests that "large, self-preserving memeplexes such as religions, scientific theories or political ideologies might fit the analogy better" but that there is no necessity for a vehicle to form in any evolutionary process and she cautions memeticists to "avoid the temptation of assuming there must always be [one]" (1999:65). Throughout the case study question will be considered in relation to a variety of candidates for the memetic vehicle. These include not only the institutional and ideological structures related to the political parties contesting the election, but also the digital repositories of knowledge such as webpages and Social Networking Applications (SNAs) through which party memes are disseminated.

The institutional memeplex

Developing the idea of the ideological network and the organisational or institutional structure as the meme vehicle and the individual memes they produce as replicators may prove beneficial to the discussion of propaganda. Although the utility of these ideas will be examined in relation to the specific case study addressed within this project it will be useful to examine the theoretical basis as laid out within the memetic literature.

Dawkins wrote about the possible existence of what he called the “co-adapted meme complex” (2006b:199). He speculated that ideas which are mutually reinforcing, such as those of ‘God’ and ‘Hellfire’ could be expected to replicate alongside one another in the same way that mutually supporting sets of genes do. Arguably most of the day to day memes people encounter could be broken down into smaller memes, potentially capable of independent unitary replication. In this sense all but the simplest of potentially replicable sounds, actions or symbols can be seen as memplexes as well as memes. In order to be a meme a unit of culture must have the potential to be accurately replicated as a whole, but there is no reason to suppose that the story of *Little Red Riding Hood* for example, cannot be replicated as a unit on the grounds that the phrase “grandma what big teeth you have” can replicate independently and out of context. There is incidentally no contradiction between this rule of thumb attitude to meme size and the meme/gene analogy as is suggested by Kuper (2000), genes too are repeatedly characterised, at least by Dawkins, as units of convenience (1999, 2006b).

Whilst this line of reasoning suggests that many memes can be regarded as memplexes, not all memplexes can be regarded as memes. Dawkins suggested that “an organised church, with its architecture, ritual, laws, music, art and written tradition” could be seen as a “co-adapted stable set of mutually assisting memes” (Dawkins, 2006b:197), an argument which could also be advanced for other complex institutional or ideological structures such as the British Parliament, Marxism or Microsoft Corporation. However, whilst these structures may generate memes which replicate as independent units, the structures themselves are too vast and unwieldy to do so with any accuracy. It is for this reason that such bodies present the memeticist with a viable candidate for the cultural vehicle - the memetic equivalent of a living organism. However, Blackmore (1999) warns that this may not be an entirely stable analogy given the absence of the absolute phenotype/genotype distinction within memetics. The question of how large a memplex needs to be before it becomes too complex for unitary replication is going to be influenced in part by the effectiveness of the available mechanisms for copying memes with accuracy, suggesting that the arrival of digital technology could potentially render some memplexes ‘memes’, capable of unitary replication, where previously they would need to replicate incrementally via the gradual proliferation of

constituent memes. Unlike in genetics where a vehicle can never become a replicator, they are fundamentally different categories; it is possible that in memetics there may be grey area between the two due to the lack of the concrete phenotype, genotype distinction. An example being the detailed reproduction of Nottingham University (a complex institutional memeplex which could be considered a memetic vehicle) in their Ningbo campus in China's Zhejiang province - a replication so detailed it even included the physical reproduction of their UK campus (Fazackerley and Worthington, 2007).

The negative connotations of the virus

As an advocate for atheism Dawkins has described religion and religious faith as mind viruses (Barnes, 2006, Dawkins, 2006c). He discusses computer viruses and religions as examples of a kind of informational parasite, copied, not because of any provable benefit to copying them, but simply because they contain within them instructions to copy them and in the case of religion, to react with hostility to competing ideas and those who hold them. This idea of memes as 'mind viruses' from which people need protection was a popular theme in early memetic work including Richard Brodie's (2009) *Virus of the Mind*, a self-help book which claims it can assist the reader in disinfecting their mind from unwanted or unhelpful memes which are preventing them from achieving success or happiness. Others have been more sceptical, as Eliot Borenstein remarked in his paper on memetics and Russian popular literature: "only 'bad' memes are troped as viruses; the rest are so 'naturalized' that they go unnoticed" (2004:468).

There are certainly problems with Dawkins wholesale dismissal of religious memes as by definition perpetuated only by epidemiology, an idea which he holds up in opposition to scientific ideas claiming that "for scientific belief, epidemiology merely comes along afterwards and describes the history of its acceptance. For religious belief, epidemiology is the root cause" (2006c). As Distin (2005) points out, many of the ideas perpetuated by religious teaching may have also had observable, beneficial functions, such as religious cleansing rituals or dietary laws which prevented the spread of disease – particularly in times and places where advanced medicine was unavailable. It is an empirical question, albeit one which would be very difficult to answer, as to whether religious beliefs and their associated practices always spread solely due to the viral qualities of religious memes, or whether the perceived benefits of adopting religious memes, such getting your child into a specific school, can also play a role.

This is not to say that we should refrain from judging a meme on its qualities, but that dividing cultural replicators into 'good memes' and 'bad mind viruses' might be a misleading line of argument. Given that memetics has provided us with the possibility of taking the meme's eye view,

in addition to that of the sender or receiver of a meme or an observer of the wider society in which it replicates, the obvious question which must arise from such a distinction is 'good or bad for whom'? Such a question is arguably not likely to have a simple, a-political answer. The epidemiology of memes, the way in which ideas and fashions can spread, with each 'infected' person passing the meme on to many others, does however have significant relevance for any study of online communication. It is in this sense that the word 'viral' is used to describe popular online content as it spreads across the Web, with no necessary suggestion that such content is inherently bad. Although much of it has proved too culturally superficial to engage significant academic interest there have been some more recent studies which have focused specifically on the Internet meme (Bauckhage et al., 2013, Rintel, 2013a, Weng et al., 2012, Shifman and Thelwall, 2009) as well as some interest by those such as Mason (2013) and Gerbaudo (2012) in the context of communication within and by contemporary protest movements.

Memes are neither genes nor viruses; the comparison with either is simply analogy and therefore should be pursued only as far as it clarifies the subject under investigation. Whilst Aunger (2000b) appears to have exaggerated the distinctions between the meme as gene and 'meme as germ' factions within memetics, understanding the differences which memeticists identify between these two kinds of DNA replicator, highlights some useful concepts which could potentially be employed in this study. The idea of conceptualising institutions and ideologies as memetic vehicles may be useful in the formulation of a memetic theory of propaganda and will be dealt with in greater depth in later chapters. Once cleansed of the negative associations with a kind of cultural disease (notable in phrases such as 'thought contagion' and 'mind virus') the idea of the meme as a virus can be easily applied to online content. In fact, as will be seen in the next section, memetics has had considerably more success at replicating amongst online communities than it has as an academic discipline. It has been taken up by those communities as a description and explanation for a succession of Internet fads, including viral videos, slang phrases and images.

Internet memes

David Hull warned memeticists in 2000 that "semi-popular discussions...are likely to...lead to the 'debasement of memetics'" (2000:49), a barely veiled criticism of the then fashionable pop-science literature produced by authors such as Richard Brodie (2009) and Aaron Lynch (1996). Ironically however it is the popular conception of memetics which has managed to break out of the ontological trap which has all but demolished the dedicated academic research and which has begun to apply memetic theory to real data. The 'Internet meme' is subtly different to the academic meme;

this section will focus on defining it, providing some examples and linking pop-cultural memetics to the academic literature.

The basic difference between a meme in the academic sense and the pop-cultural or 'Internet' meme is that the latter is defined by its success. At a certain point a previously inauspicious piece of Internet detritus, a video, song, game or phrase is taken up by an Internet community and begins to replicate at a dramatic rate. It travels from community hub to community hub, perhaps gaining access to the megaphone of the broadcast or print media and may eventually achieve the status of a cultural reference point. An idea becomes an Internet meme by gaining notoriety, for the academic meme, any potentially replicable piece of cultural data is a meme, some are simply more successful than others.

Internet memes are staples of many online communities with websites such as *4Chan*, *Something Awful* and *The Cheezburger Network* (an aggregated site of blogs, smaller websites and discussion boards including *The Internet Meme Database (IMD)*), which produce and/or catalogue Internet memes. Whilst the academic meme was suggested as an explanation for the amorphous and difficult to define problem of human culture, the Internet meme is a description of an observable phenomenon. It describes the way in which little pieces of online culture are taken up, passed around, replicated, altered, improved upon and amalgamated with each other, creating a dynamic and constantly evolving cultural environment. Unlike the theoretical 'mind' meme or Blackmore's broader definition, there is strong evidence for the existence of this kind of meme in the form of aggregated databases and a growing body of more rigorous academic research.

Shifman and Thelwall (2009) tracked the progress of an Internet meme in the form of a joke about men, women and computers called either 'wife 1.0' or 'husband 1.0', noting the way in which the original form of the joke quickly split into alternative versions forming two notable patterns.

The first is a movement from "techie" to "general user" texts. Whereas earlier versions...included much computing terminology, the later versions are more understandable to the lay user. The second pattern is a zigzag movement, with the masculine versions emerging first, followed by apparently feminine "answers" that are similar to the masculine ones in their structure. (ibid:2572)

There was also evidence that the joke, when copied across different languages "incorporated small, local adaptations or 'flavors [sic]'" (ibid:2574), for example incorporating references to sports popular in the native country of the language in question. They also noted that there was some evidence from message boards that cultural resistance to the themes of the joke, including its

references to pre-marital sexual relationships, may have prevented the kind of mass replication in Arabic seen in other languages including English, Chinese, German and Japanese.

This kind of detailed tracking of a meme is methodologically very difficult; Shifman and Thelwall gathered thousands of nearly identical versions of the same joke and constructed timelines using date searches via an Internet search engine in order to map the progress of the meme across the Web. One of their reasons for selecting this particular meme was the relative ease of searching for it without coming up with large amounts of unrelated data. The collections of memes amassed by the *IMD* are identified via a crowd sourcing; members post candidate memes which are then categorised by consensus as either live memes, not memes, no longer active or variations of previously acknowledged memes. The purpose of such databases is not to understand the nature of online communication per se; it is about analysing and understanding the Internet culture which the members are a part of. As a consequence there is a certain 'clique factor' to the definition of a meme. The 'I agree with Nick' meme - one of very few pop-cultural memes from the 2010 UK election with anything positive to say about the candidates (see Chapters 5 and 7) - was rejected on the grounds that it relied too much on television and the press rather than the Internet for its replication (IMD, 2010). There is an implication that to be a 'true' Internet meme is not to be just any piece of viral data, but to be a piece of viral data with inauspicious beginnings somewhere on the Web which can then be uncovered and recorded. In this sense it is also possible to differentiate between the Internet meme, and the more general pop-cultural meme, which simply refers to any apparently self-replicating cultural unit, no matter what its origins, but which, like the Internet meme, is defined by successful replication.

The popular conception of the Internet meme has considerable advantages over the academic; it has not been weighed down by philosophical discussions about the exact nature of imitation or by active hostility from academics who feel that the theory represents an encroachment on their area of expertise by another discipline. It is simply the logic of memetic theory applied to the observable phenomenon of viral online content. As Andrew Barron (2010) of the *Internet Meme Database* points out, "trying to come up with an exact definition to suit all needs is certainly a futile exercise to be left up to the philosophers of hermeneutics".

The observations made by groups such as Barron's have been backed up by Shifman and Thelwall's (2009) research and as noted in the previous section, academic interest in the subject is growing, although the focus of projects such as the *IMD* tends to be humorous, largely apolitical and lacking

explicit contextualisation within memetic theory. However in terms of the political application of memetic theory and the meme, the use of pop-cultural memes as communication tools by protest groups from the Egyptian revolutionaries to the global Occupy movement have provided a new area for memetic analysis. This particular application is especially relevant to this project because it involves the conscious use of memes as a tool of communication to propagate a set of political messages. It also allows for the introduction of a concept which, whilst arguably compatible with more traditional memetic theory, has only been voiced explicitly by those for whom memes are a practical communication tool.

The concept is that of 'resonance', noted by Spanish activist Javier Torret who observed that "for something to be viral online, for something to be mimetic, slogans have to resonate" (2012:120), a usage of the word 'mimetic' which when used in conjunction with the term 'viral' appears synonymous with the word memetic. This notion of endowing a meme with qualities which make it better adapted to the environment is also found in Paulo Gerbaudo's (2012) discussion of the 99% meme, in which the middle and working class majority suffering the consequence of the financial downturn were placed in rhetorical opposition to the 1%, or the wealthy elite. Gerbaudo notes that like the Spanish *indignados/indignadas* to whom Torret owes political allegiance, the 99% meme relied on majoritarianism and the creation of a popular identity to which people could relate and subscribe. The notion of resonance is intended to capture this common theme repeated throughout the more practical work done by those who have studied the use of memes as a communication tool. It suggests that a meme's reproductive success is achieved not only as a result of its inherent qualities, but as a consequence of the relationship between those qualities and the prevailing socio-political attitudes, ideas and emotional states prevalent within the body politic. As Paul Mason put it, pop-cultural memes can be considered as "small cultural portions of the Zeitgeist" (2013:The challenge to info-hierarchies). The incorporation of this idea - which has been repeatedly observed in circles where memetics is seen as a means to a political end - into more traditional memetic theory is intended to provide a useful analytical tool as well as a terminological bridge between the more abstract philosophical traditions of memetics as a discipline and the practical analysis of political propaganda which is an integral part of both the protest movements analysed by Gerbaudo, Mason and Castells and the case study which will be the focus of this research.

Conclusion: Merging the pop-cultural and academic approaches

The academic version of memetics emerges from this discussion as a discipline which has been more or less rejected, a positivistic subset of mimetics with embarrassing links to sociobiology and a host

of ontological and definitional problems. Given Hull's (2000) observation that memetics appears to have been held to unusually high standards of scientific verification the blame may not lie entirely within the discipline itself. There has been a gradual waning of interest in 'classical' memetics with the few papers published after the demise of *The Journal of Memetics* in 2005, being lone examples in publications from disparate disciplines. However, despite an unenthusiastic reaction from the academy, the 'meme' meme has continued to spread and has found a home amongst Internet communities whose aggregated collections of and discussions about memes seem unhampered by the objections voiced by the academics. In fact the renewed interest in memetics seen in the work of Shifman and Thelwall (2009), Mason (2013) and Gerbaudo (2012) has largely adopted the pop-cultural definition of the meme, rejecting the need for absolute certainty about its nature and location, in favour of a selection of functional definitions which relate directly to the information being studied. The acceptance of the reality of the everyday definition of copying, such as when a video is copied from one website and embedded in another or a person goes out and buys an item of clothing because they saw a pop-star wear it on television, is also preferable to philosophical objections on the grounds that such activity could more properly be called 're-creation' (Kuper, 2000, Distin, 2005) - which are at best difficult to verify and at worst purely semantic complaints.

The problem with the pop-cultural approach is that defining a meme by what is popular has resulted in a focus on a lot of a-political cultural ephemera, interesting from an academic perspective more in terms of what it says about the way in which people communicate, than what is being communicated - although in the wake of the 2011 wave of protest movements this has begun to change a little. Using memetics to address online propaganda will require an appreciation of the pop-cultural and academic definitions because politics appears to have considerably less inherent mass appeal than popular culture. The very origin of a sound-bite in the camp of a political party rather than an Internet message board could theoretically disqualify an otherwise plausible candidate for a 'propaganda meme' from categorisation as an Internet meme. In addition the collectively defined and socially policed definitions which characterise the Internet meme - and which were responsible for disqualifying 'I agree with Nick' as an example - are both mutable and implicit, making them imprecise guides for a systematic analysis of electoral propaganda.

Consequently the working definition adopted within this study will be the original definition proposed by Dawkins (2006b) and used by scholars such as Blackmore (1999). That is, the meme is a unitary cultural replicator capable of being copied. This definition will sometimes be classed as referring to the 'academic meme', in order to differentiate it from the 'pop-cultural' meme or the 'Internet' meme which will be incorporated as specific subsets of this broader, classical definition.

The pop-cultural meme is defined as a meme which has spread sufficiently from peer to peer to have achieved a measure of cultural recognition, and the Internet meme being a further subset of the pop-cultural meme but whose origins (or the majority of its replicating history) lie specifically on the Internet.

Chapter Two: Memetics and Propaganda

Propaganda is one of the most enigmatic ideas in the study of media and politics. Whilst it is commonly agreed to exist as a category of communication, there appear to be almost as many definitions of the word as there are thinkers who have studied the concept. Unsurprisingly this has left the academy with no universal theory with which to explain propaganda or even to satisfactorily identify it. Unlike the meme, whose conceptual naissance is so recent that proscriptive definition could have a restrictive effect on research, propaganda has existed in name since the 17th Century when the Catholic church instituted *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (*Sacred Congress for the Propagation of the Faith*) a missionary training college whose purpose was to facilitate the spread of Catholicism in Africa. Some scholars arguing that it has existed in practice for much longer (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1991, Lee and Lee, 1939) and a number of the notions and perspectives explored in this chapter can be traced back to Aristotle's (2012) *Rhetoric* written in the 4th Century BCE. It is the contention of this study that the understanding of propaganda has been hindered by the manner in which both the practice, and the terms used to refer to it have evolved over time. The means used to propagate ideas are subject to their cultural, political and technological circumstances and thus attempting to use such means as a basis for propaganda's definition is problematic. In addition, the negative connotations which have surrounded propaganda since the early 20th Century have led to a variety of euphemisms such as public relations, perception management, and psychological operations, as groups seek to distance themselves from association with deception and manipulation (Berneys, 2006, Moloney, 2006).

Memetics, which is at its core a theory of cultural evolution, has a great advantage in terms of providing an overarching theory of propaganda. It argues that memes 'seek' (in a purely metaphorical sense) to propagate themselves from human mind to human mind and that all communications media, from cave paintings to Twitter have evolved to facilitate this process. Most of the memes we encounter have been successfully replicated and the memes which dominate our cultural environment have been copied many times at the expense of others which have not. Blackmore (1999) has cited this evolutionary drive towards more effective replication, as an explanation for the increased sophistication of communications technology, claiming that "as soon as memes arrived they started evolving towards greater fidelity [accuracy of copies], fecundity [number of copies] and longevity [durability of copies]; in the process they brought about the design of better and better meme-copying machinery" (1999:204). This chapter will argue that the same

principle can be applied to the evolution of increasingly effective propaganda techniques, characterising propaganda as the semiotic and linguistic mechanisms for increasing the fidelity, fecundity and/or longevity of a meme and thus facilitating the propagation of political ideas and actions. However the focus on propagation which suggests that memetics may be able to provide us with a useful perspective on propaganda may also contain a challenge: is it possible to distinguish between propaganda and other forms of cultural transmission within the framework of memetic theory, given that all memes metaphorically 'want' to be propagated?

This chapter will be an attempt to integrate the literature on propaganda with the literature on memetics discussed in Chapter 1. It will begin by discussing the relationship between propaganda and manipulation and deception, arguing for a neutral definition which focuses simply on the propagation of ideas. After that it will be possible to ask what propaganda is to the memeticist, first by looking at texts as 'memes of propaganda' followed by a discussion of the concept's subtler manifestations such as structural and sociological propaganda. This in turn will form the basis for a discussion of memetics, propaganda and the news media, with a particular focus on more structural forms of propaganda including the relationship between the memetic concept of the viral ideology, Nick Davies (2009) celebrated work on 'churnalism' and Herman and Chomsky's (1988) Propaganda Model.

What is propaganda?

There is considerable disagreement within the literature as to how propaganda should be defined. Many detailed studies from a variety of perspectives, such as Herman and Chomsky's (1988) *Manufacturing Consent*, Miller and Dinan's (2008) *A Century of Spin* and Kevin Moloney's (2006) *Rethinking Public Relations* have defined it explicitly or implicitly as synonymous with deception, manipulation or insidious social control. However, this association between propaganda and bias or deception is relatively recent in origin, stemming from the USA in the wake of WWI (Clark, 1997). As the US public began to appreciate the extent to which, not only foreign enemies and dictatorships, but their own government had utilised propaganda as a weapon in that conflict, distrust of propaganda and propagandists began to increase. This did not however limit its production; on the contrary the inter-war period witnessed the naissance of the modern PR industry. This was formed in part by men who had been involved in producing US propaganda during the War including Edward Bernays, who had worked for the Committee on Public Information under George Creel (see Miller's introduction to Bernays, 2006). Bernays later claimed some of the credit for the rebranding of propaganda as public relations (Curtis, 2002), however he maintained a vocal support for the older

term, which he considered to be a neutral expression for the “organised effort to spread a...belief or doctrine” (Berneys, 2006:48).

Since this period it has become commonplace to identify propaganda with lies and deception, a process which has essentially reduced the concept to little more than a pejorative term. This appears to be at least partially a consequence of the way in which has been studied, rather than an inherent attribute of the concept itself, in addition of course to the genuine and well documented misuse of propaganda which has been widely recorded, often in the context of social control by elite groups. For example Miller and Dinan’s (2008) work addresses the abuse of propaganda by global capitalist and governmental elites, arguing that it is widely used to promote the interests of global capitalism and undermine or co-opt those who would stand against it. The authors make an argument, based on a detailed description of the successful use of propaganda by their political opponents, that it is inherently bad. They contend that:

The battle for ideas is important...because of the necessity for [the] approach to communication and power [embodied in propaganda] to be swept away, and the possibility of democratic dialogue, deliberation and decision making to be established. (ibid:182)

This short quotation alone corresponds with the varied definitions of propaganda as supplied by at least three other thinkers. It uses rhetoric which conforms to one of Nicholas J. O’Shaughnessy’s (2004) three common characteristics of propaganda (the others being rhetoric and symbolism). The authors set up an apparent choice with an obviously preferable option, which is a psychological trick identified by Pratkanis and Aronson’s (1991) definition of propaganda. The words ‘democratic dialogue, deliberation and decision making’ are what Lee and Lee refer to as ‘Glittering Generalities’ - the use of positive names to deflect critique - which form one of seven propaganda techniques identified in their study and the same phrase also forms an alliterative three part list, a technique described by Atkinson in his study of political communication (1984).

This is not to dispute Miller and Dinan’s (2008) contention that propaganda has been used in deceptive and reprehensible ways by governments and corporate elites; it is to argue that they fail to properly defend their conception of propaganda as a function of the power relations which stem from the dominance of those elites. This is a point which needs to be addressed if their advocacy to ‘sweep away’ that approach to communication is to be meaningful or possible. The memetic approach sees propaganda as dispersed throughout all forms of communication rather than restricted to specific groups. This is not to suggest that all groups have access to equal resources

when it comes to propagating their memes which is manifestly not the case. Rather it argues for a perspective on propaganda which is not dissimilar to Foucault's perspective on power, viewing it as something inextricably bound up with human communication from which it is not possible to 'free' oneself, but which is also not inherently evil (see Hay, 2002 for a more detailed outline of these ideas).

Kevin Moloney (2006) attempts to reconcile the PR literature with the more critical literature on propaganda itself, by arguing that the antagonism identified by Miller and Dinan (2008) between propaganda and democracy could be overcome by resource redistribution overseen by a government regulator similar to the Office of Communications (Ofcom), the UK's media regulator. Whereas the most popular, contemporary paradigm within the literature on public relations appears to suggest that PR is a more dualistic form of communication than propaganda, Moloney argues that PR can be seen as 'propaganda light', although this does rely on a simplistic definition of propaganda as 'manipulative communication'. There are however problems with his suggestion to regulate public relations more strictly, not least the fact that, as he points out himself, government is currently the most prolific user of PR/propaganda in the UK, and thus poorly placed to police its use. These simple definitions, where propaganda is equated with manipulative communication, such as those employed by Moloney (2006) or Miller and Dinan (2008), allow for comprehensive and systematic analysis of some manifestations of propaganda, but also fall somewhat into the trap of defining propaganda as 'communication by the enemy'. Moloney's distinction between PR and propaganda is also somewhat imprecise, possibly resulting as much from a desire to rescue PR from the ignominy of association with propaganda than any demonstrable distinction between the two.

The early 20th Century definition of propaganda in which Lee and Lee describe as "opinion expressed for the purpose of influencing actions of individuals or groups" (1939:15) can be seen as preferable. Whilst its specific reference to changing people's actions rather than opinions could be considered limiting, it does conform to Jaques Ellul's (1973) subsequent analysis of propaganda which placed a primacy on the significance of action. Separating the moral judgements which can and should be made about the individual uses of propaganda from its definition does not remove a researcher's responsibility to critically evaluate how propaganda is used in practice. It merely ensures that those judgements are made based on how propaganda is being used and what it is being used for, as opposed to allowing them to confuse the definition of what propaganda is. Art for example can be used for propagandistic purposes, either deliberately or because a political movement uses a work

of art to promote their cause. The feminist Lucy Lippard (1980) went as far as to suggest that 'good propaganda' is also good art, in that it is both provocative and politically engaged.

This conception of propaganda as a neutral term has gained some more recent adherents such as Zahera Harb (2011a) in her analysis of Lebanese domestic news coverage during the 1996 Israeli invasion. As a journalist during this period, Harb aimed to demonstrate the devastating impact of the violence (which Israel was characterising as 'surgical' and targeted against Hezbollah), on the Lebanese civilian population. She notes that even a colleague who refrained from using "emotional and subjective words" (ibid:125) in her coverage still sought to provide the same effect through her selection of film footage, despite claiming to adhere to the values of journalistic objectivity and integrity. Harb and her colleagues also desired to assist in unifying Lebanon in resistance to the invasion, a role she identifies as explicitly propagandistic. Lebanon is a nation with a long history of sectarian conflict which in 1996, was still recovering from a 15 year long civil war. Harb therefore considers the unification of the nation in the face of aggression as a positive consequence of what she terms 'liberation propaganda'. Harb's analysis takes some of the normally negative techniques of propaganda such as self-censorship and bias, and demonstrates that, in certain extreme circumstances, such as when a country is actively being invaded by a foreign power, they can have positive effects. She is not however, arguing that propaganda is a necessary evil, something unpleasant but defensible in extreme circumstances. Rather the complexity of the issues of propaganda, bias, neutrality and journalistic ethics she experienced when operating as a journalist in the context of foreign invasion, led her to argue for a neutral definition of propaganda, whose morality should be judged in the context of its production and in light of its effects (2011b). Within this broader definition it is possible to imagine unambiguously positive examples of propaganda, such as a public health campaign which results in a reduction in child mortality.

Arguing that propaganda need not be automatically characterised as deceptive or viewed as inherently evil is not the same as arguing that it is defined as positive or benign; the negative connotations which surround the term, exist because propaganda has been utilised deceptively and in order to promote reprehensible doctrines and policies. However using this moral evaluation to define propaganda risks obscuring its use for ambiguous, benevolent or benign purposes; the morality of ideas and the techniques used for propagating them can and should be subject to moral scrutiny without limiting propaganda to that which fails to live up to the standards of those evaluating them. This subjective approach to propaganda's moral status is both in keeping with the historical meaning of the term as simply 'the organised propagation of ideas' and avoids relegating

the term to the status of a rhetorical device used only to undermine the arguments of people, ideologies or policies with which a person disagrees.

Techniques of persuasion

Another approach taken by scholars attempting to define and analyse propaganda is to identify common techniques used by those attempting to persuade or to propagate ideas. This is an aspect of propaganda which can be traced back all the way to the 4th Century BCE and Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric* (2012), in which the author analyses the root cause of a series of emotional responses, presenting a selection of ways that such responses can be elicited in an audience in order to persuade them to adopt the point of view of an orator. In more contemporary literature Nicholas J. O'Shaughnessy devotes several chapters to analysing the competing meanings of propaganda, identifying myth, rhetoric and symbolism as the three primary characteristics by which the practice can be identified. However he cautions against any hard and fast definition, arguing, with particular reference to the psychological analysis of propaganda, that "there is no universal 'key' to propaganda...those who look for a universal theory...search in vain. The many manifestations of propaganda...must be addressed in a heterodox way" (2004:62). The majority of examples he provides of the use of propaganda, which he regards as inherently manipulative but not necessarily evil, utilise some combination of these three attributes. However there are exceptions, bureaucratic propaganda for example uses 'grey' or abstruse language and statistics to disseminate ideas (or repress them), rather than the drama of symbolism and rhetoric or the narrative power of myth. O'Shaughnessy's extensive if fractured analysis of propaganda produces no overall definition, however it is possible that this and the conclusion that a universal theory of propaganda is impossible, owes more to his analytical approach than to the concept itself. He attempts to define propaganda via the techniques of persuasion employed by those who have used it and concludes that these techniques, like propaganda's moral connotations, are subjective and liable to alter substantially in different historical, political and technological contexts. However as his analysis is thematic rather than chronological or structured around any specific theory, he fails to identify the nature of this change, or to interrogate the way in which the different techniques of propaganda spread and mutate. These are areas on which memetic theory should be able to elaborate.

Alfred and Elizabeth Lee, who were key proponents of the discipline of propaganda analysis in the pre-war era (Sproule, 1987), provide a stricter definition of propaganda for the purposes of 'scientific' analysis than the general definition previously quoted, arguing that propaganda is the "expression of opinion or action by individuals or groups deliberately designed to influence other

individuals or groups with reference to predetermined ends” (1939:15). The restriction of propaganda to deliberate persuasion by those with definite goals has been repeatedly challenged by later researchers such as the French theorist Jacques Ellul (1973) who argued that propaganda, including that produced by those with good intentions, has far reaching and often unintended psychological consequences. The definition itself appears imperfectly focused. For example, whilst it includes a reference to the opinions and actions of the propagandist, the only reference to the person subject to propaganda is the term 'influence' which is vague and does not refer explicitly to the propagation of ideas or actions.

Whilst their definition may be problematic, Lee and Lee's (1939) analysis remains remarkably applicable today. They identify what they refer to as the seven techniques of propaganda, these include:

1. Name Calling – giving something a bad name to turn the audience against it.
2. Glittering Generality – giving something a good name to make the audience support it.
3. Transfer – transferring the prestige of something - e.g. an organisation - to something else (this can also work in reverse with the transfer of notoriety).
4. Testimonial – reflecting the reputation of a person (good or bad) onto a subject you wish to promote or defame.
5. Plain Folks – making the audience feel the speaker is an ordinary person rather than a member of the elite.
6. Card Stacking – selective use of facts.
7. Bandwagon – gaining support by referencing something or someone's already existing popularity (real or imagined).

Whilst all these techniques are still used by those seeking to promote ideas and policies, they are by no means an exhaustive list (Sparkes-Vian, 2013). Their analysis is primarily a study of rhetoric, the kind of impassioned, emotive, one-to-many public speaking which Aristotle discussed, updated for a society with a mass broadcast media. Similarly Max Atkinson's analysis of political speech making, in which he identifies what he calls 'clap traps' – rhetorical formulations intended to elicit applause, can be seen in a similar light. O'Shaughnessy (2004) argues that rhetoric itself is only one of the three primary aspects of propaganda, suggesting that the narrow focus of the study renders it incomplete. This focus also makes it a poor tool for exploring the kind of underlying systemic propaganda which Ellul (1973) terms sociological or 'pre'-propaganda; something he argues must

exist within a society in order for the ideas embedded within the kind of direct propaganda Lee and Lee (1939) analyse to successfully propagate. This less direct and obvious manifestation of propaganda will be discussed in more detail in the section on structural propaganda within this chapter. It is the position of this study that Lee and Lee's rhetorical techniques, Atkinson's 'clap traps' and O'Shaughnessy's key characteristics are all valid but incomplete as ways to understand and identify propaganda. The tendency shown by such a diverse group of thinkers to attempt to define propaganda via an analysis of commonly identifiable techniques will always be insufficient to understand the phenomenon as a whole because propaganda itself is evolving over time. This is why the memetic definition with which this chapter will conclude represents a preferable alternative.

Pratkanis and Aronson (1991) talk about propaganda in contrast to 'legitimate' persuasion and in terms of psychological trickery and like the thinkers already discussed, they too centre their analysis on the use of specific techniques of persuasion. Their initial argument suggests that they consider propaganda to be both deceptive and manipulative, relying on the exploitation of people's psychological vulnerabilities. They argue that simple tricks, such as giving apparent reasons for an action – even if these involve complete non-sequiturs – can elicit compliance. This happens because human beings operate in two potential states when consuming information; central processing and peripheral processing. In the former a person pays close analytical attention to the information they receive, in the latter their attention is divided and they respond to generalities and impressions rather than specifics (ibid:8). A person in the latter state is much easier to fool with propaganda than the person in the former, but as the former requires more energy and concentration people cannot constantly operate in it. It should also be noted that they do see certain benefits in using some of the techniques of propaganda or salesmanship – providing it is done in a spirit of honesty. For example they point to its use in persuading people to insulate their homes to save energy (ibid:9). Maria Pardo makes a similar point in her discussion of linguistic persuasion, posing the question: "where persuasive means...do not conform to certain ethical principles, can we still talk of persuasion, or are we forced to recognise a verbal mode of power?" (2001:96). Pardo appears to view persuasion as a contrasting concept to rhetoric, although the latter is not clearly defined in her study beyond being an antecedent to persuasion and "essentially linked to politics" (ibid:95). By contrast this study will consider both terms - especially when used in a political context - as subcategories of propaganda, with rhetoric representing its more hyperbolic manifestations and persuasion techniques which are more subtle or cerebral. As the perspective on power taken within this study views it as dispersed and present in all communication the distinction between manipulation and persuasion which she raises does not apply. However Pardo's suggestion that

political arguments need to be "'catching', thus enabling a high degree of re-production chiefly at the media level" is relevant to the conception of propaganda as a means to propagate memes. So too is her concept of the 'persuasive chain' which is formed as an argument passes from person to person, a notion which will be relevant to the discussion of digital campaign propaganda in Chapter 3.

Techniques such as Lee and Lee's (1939) seven techniques of propaganda; the psychological and emotional manipulation identified by Pratkanis and Aronson (1991) and the use of rhetoric, myth and symbolism noted by O'Shaughnessy (2004), can be seen as identifying features of propaganda and are easily compatible with a memetic analysis. Where a memetic analysis differs is that rather than seeing these as simply techniques of persuasion, they are seen as the attributes of a meme which facilitate its replication throughout society.

Memes of propaganda

What makes a meme, a meme of propaganda? Memes are, in a purely metaphorical sense, selfish beings; they 'seek' only to maximise their own replication. As long as they replicate as a unit, when people cease to replicate them they die - although fragments of them may survive alone or when amalgamated with other memes. The techniques discussed in the previous section represent a small number of the ways in which memes, either as actions, ideas or texts can be made more likely to replicate successfully and therefore to survive in a given environment. This increased likelihood of successful replication in a meme will be referred to in this study as 'replicator power' and is broadly equivalent to a kind of contagious popularity, a quality which makes a meme attractive to those who encounter it and worthy of imitation. This is consistent with the notion of power suggested earlier in this study as something distributed and bound to communication, but is also specific to memetic theory in that this form of power is neither an abstract concept, nor a political goal in and of itself, but relates to the capacity of a meme to replicate.

Any propaganda technique which increases a meme's capacity to replicate can also be considered a meme in its own right. For example, where a technique such as one of Max Atkinson's (1984) 'clap traps'⁹ is written down and has copies made of it, that technique replicates as what Distin (2005) would call a schematic meme and Blackmore (2010) would call 'copy the instructions' meme. This allows such techniques to be learned and applied to multiple speeches from different speakers and

⁹ Atkinson defines the clap trap very literally as a verbal formulation in a speech designed to elicit applause for example the three part list.

in different political contexts, potentially transferring the increase in replicator power the technique initially provided. Such a technique can also be taken up and examined by politicians or academic experts and refined, adapted to purpose or amalgamated with other techniques. This is the basis for the argument made within this study that propaganda itself can be seen as an evolving phenomenon. However this should not imply that such techniques can only replicate as a set of explicit instructions, both Atkinson (1984) and Lee and Lee (1939) arrive at a set of techniques by observing the rhetorical practices of political speakers and inferring a set of recognisable techniques from them. Rhetorical techniques and strategic public relations manoeuvres can also be imitated directly by watching a successful propagandist at work, identifying key features of their behaviour which allow them to facilitate the spread of specific memes relating to policy or ideology and imitating them, without the necessity of explicitly codifying such a technique.

The process of training public relations specialists and the general professionalisation of the PR industry is an extreme example of the more schematic approach. Nikos Salingaros and Terry Mikiten (2002) describe this process of institutionalisation in the context of architecture, suggesting that it is in itself a mechanism whereby larger memeplexes such as the aesthetic and ideological traditions of modernism can be accurately reproduced. Within the context of public relations, its pedagogical institutionalisation within higher education not only reproduces the successful propaganda techniques of past generations, it puts a comforting gloss on propaganda practices which can be abused, by placing an intellectual distance between PR and propaganda and as Blackmore observed, such “comforting ideas are more likely to last” (1999:202). Kevin Moloney (2006) points to the over extension of the Grundian Paradigm, this is a best practice model for PR which describes a dialogical communication between consumer and propagandist. Whilst it is often held up within PR courses as a theoretical distinction between PR and propaganda, the authors only observed its practice in a small minority of firms. The argument that propaganda can be of use to those who consume it was also made with explicit reference to the term in the 1920s. Edward Berneys (2006) who made this argument was one of the founders of the PR industry. This industry has turned propaganda into a commodity and provided a market incentive to invent new ways to propagate ideas and products for those able to pay for a PR company’s professional expertise. The net consequence of these developments is the replication of memes as techniques to facilitate the replication of memes as texts and ideas. This form of institutionalisation may have gained a new lease of life in the commercial realm during the 20th and 21st Centuries, but very birth of propaganda as a term can be traced back to exactly this form of pedagogical memetic transmission, where missionaries from the 17th Century were taught and passed on successful techniques for the propagation of Catholic

memes in the newly conquered African colonies (see Pratkanis and Aronson, 1991, Miller and Dinan, 2008)

Memetic theory suggests that such techniques will spread (particularly when effective), as people notice which techniques successfully increase replicator power and attempt to apply them to memes promoting their own brands, ideologies or products – including attempts at self-promotion. This is a form of methodically directed natural selection in which the desire to effectively promote ideas in an environment of high competition for public attention, leads individuals and organisations to search for increasingly effective ways to propagate their ideas. As Dennett (2003) points out, this kind of deliberate replication of memes is well within the scope of natural selection, in such cases human activities and desires simply form a significant selection pressure on the memes concerned. He cites a parallel with the genetics of animal husbandry where the intention is to produce livestock with specific characteristics, noting that Darwin dedicated a portion of *Origin of Species* to this form of evolutionary change.

Meme texts

The meme's eye view...looks at the world in terms of opportunities for replication - what will help a meme to make more copies of itself and what will prevent it? (Blackmore, 1999:37)

The description of a meme as a text is intended simply to provide a counterpoint to the meme as technique. It does not refer only to literal texts but to any replicable cultural unit which might contain an identifiable technique for the facilitation of its replicator power. In order to determine whether a meme can be considered a meme of propaganda, it will be necessary to identify any techniques which are embedded within that meme that could conceivably increase its capacity to replicate. If some are found, are any of those techniques allowing the meme to act as a kind of emissary for other, larger memplexes (for example ideologies, public personalities or institutions) in other words, if we suspect it is a meme of propaganda, what is it propaganda for? This latter point is particularly important in light of the general capacity to replicate which is a definitional factor for all memes and the vast quantity of subjects, which it is possible to make propaganda about.

Toby Clark in his analysis of the relationship between art and propaganda dismissed at a stroke "Hollywood movies, TV news, advertising and other areas of the mass media [as]...too broad and pervasive to be usefully described as propaganda" (1997:14). The key word here is 'usefully', he does not deny the potential roles these play in disseminating ideological messages, but considers the

restriction of the term propaganda to “overtly political messages” (ibid) a practical necessity. Memetics is not the only theoretical perspective which rejects this notion; Ellul (1973) for example, argues forcefully that propaganda can only truly be understood as an all-encompassing phenomenon which pervades the totality of a society. However it is a reasonable argument to suggest that a definition which risks including all communication under the umbrella of propaganda is even less conceptually useful than one which arbitrarily excludes some possible examples for the sake of clarity in its analysis.

Memetics, along with Lee and Lee’s (1939) model and the psychological traditions which Pratkanis and Aronson (1991) adhere to, sees propaganda as dispersed through society and human social relations. The capacity to structure every unit of information in a manner which attempts to make it more likely to a) be copied into a mind, b) be retained, c) be repeated and/or acted upon is something which people frequently engage in even in day to day communication. It is bound up in the very nature of human communication and does not have to be deceptive, nor does it have to be overtly political. When a person trying to convince friends to come out to a particular pub, tells them that a mutual friend went there the other week and subsequently praised it, they are utilising Testimonial (one of Lee and Lee’s (1939) seven characteristics of propaganda) to increase the likelihood that the meme ‘go to Pub X’ will be replicated. The consequences of such a communication are unlikely to have any massive political ramifications, although the use of word of mouth, ‘buzz’ or viral marketing is certainly an area which has prompted interest amongst professional propagandists particularly in the commercial realm (Roach, 2006, Moloney, 2006).

These points may be demonstrated more clearly through non-hypothetical examples. Figure 1 is a benign meme of propaganda, its status as a meme is demonstrated by the fact that it can and has been copied, its status as propaganda will be demonstrated by the forthcoming analysis. This poster was produced by the National Health Service (NHS) in order to improve public hygiene in relation to colds and flu, and consists of a simple set of instructions combined with a selection of recognised propaganda techniques. This makes the meme a ‘copy the instructions’ meme with the actions themselves as the ‘copy the product’ meme associated with it. These techniques are designed to propagate both the instructions themselves and the actions the instructions are trying to get people to follow.



Figure 1: NHS Poster

dispassionate propagation of practical instructions. However it is still propaganda, it has been designed to ensure that the message attracts attention and is copied into the minds of those who see it and it also contains recognised techniques for increasing the replicator power of the ideas it is intended to promote. For purposes of hypothetical comparison, consider a small handwritten notice with the words 'Blow your nose in a tissue, dispose of the tissue in a bin and then wash your hands'. It is the same message with the propaganda techniques removed and as such can be seen to lack the replicator power of the former meme.

The consequences of producing such propaganda would at worst involve the NHS wasting money promoting a campaign which had no effect on people's behaviour. At best, the

A slogan using the 'list of three' format described by Atkinson (1984) is used to encapsulate the instructions in a way that is memorable. Underneath a short explanation of why each action should be performed is also provided – this links in with Pratkanis and Aronson's (1991) observation that people tend to obey instructions more readily when given a reason to do so. The instructions are represented as icons in a clinical blue; this underlines the Testimonial employed by the NHS logo – representing a trusted and authoritative source of information on medical matters. This is not propaganda designed to elicit an emotional response such as fear at the spread of a deadly disease, it is the



Figure 2: Benefit Fraud Poster

'catch it, bin it, kill it' meme propagates successfully and some people also follow the instructions, reducing the likelihood that they will pass on cold and flu germs to others. The only set of external memes which this could act as an emissary for would be those relating to swine flu for which the campaign was an initial response (BBC, 2009). However, the poster itself makes no direct reference to the H1N1 virus, and the instructions remain pertinent to many more varieties of cold and flu. The slogan itself has outlasted the government that introduced it and has been adopted more widely by the NHS. This suggests that within the specialised environment of the NHS and Department of Health, this is an example of a fairly successful meme (NHS-Local, 2011). It is also an example of the kind of good or benign propaganda identified by Mark Miller (2006) and by Lee and Lee (1939), which often gets overlooked when discussing propaganda in the context of the deceptive or manipulative machinations of the corporate or government elites. Under the memetic model it gains the status of propaganda simply by including techniques designed to increase the replicator power of its internal instructions, a set of practices which (once identified) can also replicate as memes.

Figure 2 is also a meme of propaganda produced by the UK government, in this case by the Department for Work and Pensions. However the moral status of this utilisation of the techniques of propaganda is more open to question. It uses emotional manipulation in line with the techniques identified by Pratkanis and Aronson (1991), with text and graphics designed to provoke fear, guilt and recrimination. The woman identified as the 'benefit thief' is depicted at an angle which puts the viewer in the position of a judging authority. The text assures us that her excuses will not be accepted and her expression conveys guilt. The use of red and white text on black along with the use of the phrase 'targeting' next to a target logo produces an oppressive even aggressive atmosphere. The repeated use of the phrase 'benefit thief' throughout the campaign (it occurred every time this poster was reproduced and on a selection of other poster designs from the same campaign) is an example of Name Calling, in keeping with the theme which presents those who claim benefits to which they are not entitled as criminals who must be targeted with rhetorical violence. This is accompanied by an invitation for those who are not 'guilty', to inform on neighbours who they believe may be breaking the rules.

If the media environment in which the previous image was sent out to replicate in included considerable reporting on the subject of swine flu, this image faces an environment in which many newspapers, particularly tabloids, exhibit serious hostility to those receiving benefits (Garthwaite, 2011). This poster is designed to take advantage of that environment in order to reproduce a message; however unlike the previous poster this one can act as an emissary for a more complex set

of ideological memes linked to the narrative identified in Garthwaite's research. Moreover the claims it makes are open to question, not only does it portray complex issues in terms of absolute certainty but the campaign itself represents a process of selection on behalf of the government in terms of who they target. *The Guardian* reported during the course of this campaign the figure that the DWP put on 'benefit theft' for 2005 as £900million, whilst leaked Treasury figures reported tax theft at an "annual loss of between £97bn and £150bn" (Taylor, 2007). The difference, the article argues, is that 'keeping quiet about working a few extra hours' is a crime committed by poor people, whilst tax evasion and avoidance tend to be disproportionately committed by the wealthy.

This example inadvertently draws attention to another aspect of propaganda relevant to a memetic analysis – particularly in the context of online propaganda in a digital age. Propaganda memes such as these posters can be replicated very accurately, as a single meme they might produce millions of identical copies to be put on display in hospitals and jobcentres around the country. Their constituent parts, the slogans the message and the ideas within them could also replicate in millions of receptive minds as independent memes.

As a consequence complex memes such as posters which contain a collection of individual memes which can replicate independently can be considered memplexes, a collection of memes which replicate together because doing so increases their replicator power. In Kate Distin's (2005) terms individual aspects of a memplex such as the DWP poster can be seen as 'alleles' interchangeable constituent memes which can be substituted for alternatives thus potentially changing the meaning and altering the capacity of the meme to replicate in a given environment. This can be seen most clearly in cases where Internet memes have been reproduced through image macros which allow for the substitution of specific aspects of a larger meme such as the text or picture with alternative texts and images, often copied from other arenas of popular culture. This was noted by Bauckhage et al (2013) in reference to the 'y u no' Internet meme which also observed

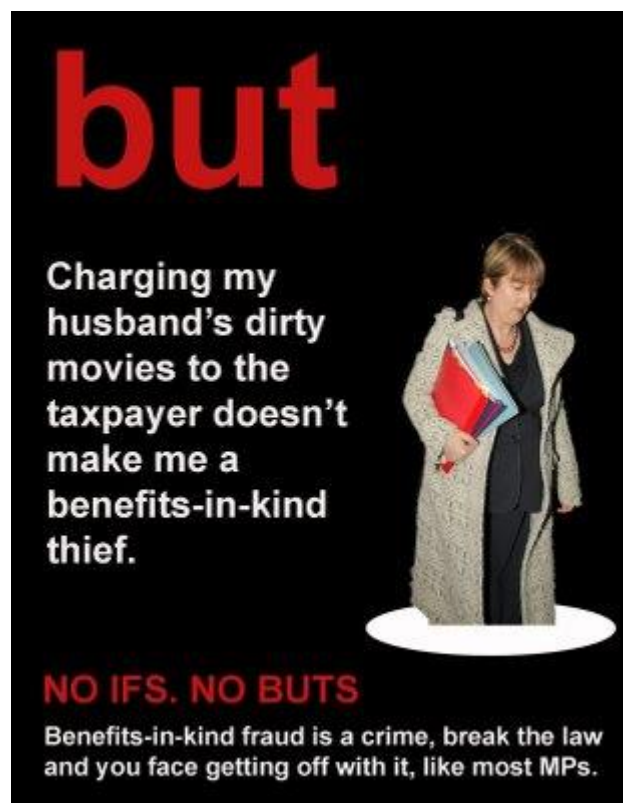


Figure 3: Spoofed Labour Party Poster

the cross-breeding of Internet memes as the text or image from one was substituted for an aspect of another recognised meme. This is only possible because, whilst memes such as the posters discussed within this section do replicate as a coherent unit, they can also be disaggregated into smaller constituent memes and as such can be considered memeplexes.

Taylor's (2007) article paired up the slogan 'No ifs... No Buts...' with relevant facts excluded from the campaign; other examples include digitally spoofed versions of similar posters such as Figure 3, which was modelled on another poster from the same campaign and can be seen as a further iteration of that meme. In memetic terms this latter response to propaganda could be referred to as the 'satire trick'. A meme which is also a memeplex encounters a mind which is hostile to its message. If it is to replicate at all, the message must be subverted. In this way many of the memes within it, the slogan, the layout and the red and white text on black can be replicated, however it ceases to propagate the same set of instructions and ceases to act as propaganda for the same set of ideas, a notion which will be of particular relevance in Chapter 7. Rather than propagating the message that people on benefits are potential criminals who need to be 'targeted' by the authorities, Figure 3 propagates the idea that politicians are untrustworthy and hypocritical. Memes are after all 'selfish'; or more literally they are inert texts which possess only a purely metaphorical agency, an allegorical expression of the tautology that 'those best adapted to replicate will tend to do so more successfully'. Memes do not replicate in any specific person's interests (or the interests of any larger memeplex) out of loyalty, they simply 'exploit' any opportunity they can for replication because by definition that is what a replicator does.

This analysis suggests that a meme of propaganda is one which is *designed* to propagate and designed to propagate a specific idea, symbol or set of instructions. It includes within it techniques which are designed to facilitate the spread of the ideas within it. As memes like any replicator can be expected to evolve to be good at replicating, much of human communication can be expected to incorporate similar techniques. In order to solve the conceptual difficulty this places on memetics, where every or at least most memes can be considered 'propaganda for something' it is not necessary to exclude certain kinds of communication such as 'marketing' (O'Shaughnessy, 2004) or 'Hollywood movies' (Clark, 1997), simply to be very clear about what a specific meme can be considered propaganda for. Individual memes of propaganda are only one aspect of propaganda as a whole and memetic theory can also be applied to conceptions of propaganda which rely less on individual pieces of data, and more on the structures and forces which shape the nature of the social world and the ideas which proliferate within it.

Beyond the text: Structural propaganda

One of the advantages of memetic theory when addressing propaganda is that it can analyse it on many levels, from the propaganda techniques embedded in a single meme to the structural propaganda which governs which ideas replicate most effectively at the level of a whole society. This section will first elaborate on Ellul's (1973) notion of propaganda as a total, all-encompassing phenomenon which can only be understood at the level of a mass population, arguing that despite his objections, many of his conceptual arguments are in fact fully compatible with analysis of propaganda at a micro level. Having discussed his notion of sociological propaganda in the context of news manipulation, the analysis will then progress to a memetic examination of the news media. Memetics can arguably provide an interesting perspective on both the increase in 'churnalism' noted by Nick Davies (2009), where press releases are recycled as a consequence of journalists increased workload, and the process of ideological censorship by structural selection, identified in Herman and Chomsky's (1988) Propaganda Model.

Ellul's (1973) theory of propaganda describes it as a modern phenomenon, something which has only truly been in existence since the advent of mass media, or at least previous iterations of it have been vastly more primitive by comparison. Certainly Aristotle's (2012) discussion of rhetoric lacked the focus on *mass* persuasion and the propagation of ideas throughout a whole society which could have linked his discussion on rhetoric to the replication of a sovereign's head on a nation's coins. For Ellul (1973), the distinction between modern propaganda (i.e. that which existed in the early to mid-20th Century) and that which has existed in previous societies (and some contemporary ones), is its potential for totality; not only could it dominate an entire person psychologically but it could also spread via the mass media across an entire nation and beyond. For the memeticist, what Ellul (1973) has identified here is not a distinction between propaganda and non-propaganda but the evolutionary nature of a phenomenon which can alter and adapt as better tricks for replication are discovered and replicated. His understanding of propaganda is heavily linked to action and his definition puts action, including passive participation (i.e. action through inaction) at the centre of the concept.

"Propaganda is a set of methods employed by an organised group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organisation." (ibid:61)

In memetic terms a call to action can be seen as an instruction in terms of Blackmore's distinction between a meme as an instruction and a meme as a product. If copied accurately instructions can form the basis for a self-correcting system of replication when a meme is replicated from person to person over multiple generations (see Dawkins' introduction in Blackmore, 1999).

The initial consequence for a meme of dissemination through mass media is a huge increase in fecundity and fidelity – if a meme of propaganda such as an advert or political speech is broadcast over the radio, millions of people can receive an identical copy of the speech directly into their homes. However if after hearing it they are convinced of the veracity of the claims made within it and wish to tell their friends, they are unlikely to be able to replicate the meme in its entirety. The ability to recall and replicate all the arguments and rhetorical techniques which made the meme successful in penetrating their own mind and persuading them to pass it on would be a rare skill. However if the meme also contained an instruction – buy this product, vote for me, go out on strike, listen in next week etc. – this can be remembered and repeated much more easily and surrounded by whatever arguments the person feels will be most likely to convince their friends to follow them.

One of the means which Ellul (1973) identifies for achieving the participation and psychological unification of the masses is what he calls pre or sociological propaganda. This involves the preparation of the environment in which propaganda is to be dispersed in order to make it more receptive to a particular message or call to action. He compares this to ploughing the soil before sewing the seed of 'true' propaganda – identifiable because of its call for a specific action. In a modern context this could relate to the practices of political PR operatives and their agenda setting actions in relation to the news media. For example in their analysis of agenda setting on Spanish radio, Castelló and Montagut describe a common PR practice whereby political operatives deliver a short phone statement dubbed a 'news pill' on an early morning radio news program.

PR managers know that this statement will be reproduced throughout the morning, will require a response from the political adversary, and might have repercussions in other media (press or even television). (2010:512)

This insertion of a small strategic meme at the right point allows for more complex arguments on the same subject to be delivered later via more lengthy interviews and may also function to deflect the news agenda away from alternative sources which the PR operative is keen to repress. A similar but more insidious practice is that of leaking information anonymously in order to achieve the same effect, but without allowing the audience the opportunity to incorporate the politics of who framed

the news line into their assessment of the story. The historian Mark Curtis in his analysis of the media operation surrounding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has argued that the British intelligence agencies “continually create alarmist disinformation” (2004:103-4); a propaganda practice which is more deceptive and thus can be seen as ethically problematic. Examples cited by Curtis (2004) include fatuous claims that terrorists were going to be able to create a nuclear bomb due to access to ‘red mercury’ or nuclear artillery shells from former Soviet republics. The purpose of pre-propaganda is to prepare the public mind for the acceptance and endorsement of action, which for Ellul (1973) is key to the understanding of true propaganda. In this case the propagation of idea that the UK should engage in military action is facilitated by the pre-propagation of memes which characterise the targets of that action as a threat. This can be understood memetically in terms of resonance, pre-propaganda is the practice of sending out memes which resonate with an ultimate goal, policy or instruction with the aim of facilitating its replication and acceptance when it is subsequently released.

Viral news and selection by structure

Nick Davies coined the phrase ‘Flat Earth news’ in 2008 to describe a particular phenomenon he had researched extensively and which he argues is fatally undermining the honesty of the news media. According to Davies "this is Flat Earth news. A story appears to be true. It is widely accepted as true. It becomes heresy to suggest that it is not true – even if it is riddled with falsehood, distortion and propaganda" (2009:12). Fittingly for an evolutionary analysis of propaganda, the process he describes which leads to this low standard of truthfulness in news reporting is the consequence of cumulative selection. He describes the process whereby the news media reported overwhelmingly prior to the 2003 invasion, that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD):

[The story] began with the cautious estimates of intelligence experts, who happened to be wrong. They were picked up and exaggerated by politicians and Iraqi exiles who had a vested interest in promoting them. They were then spread still further by politicians and pundits who genuinely knew nothing at all about Iraqi weapons (ibid:35).

Categorising the official intelligence estimates as the initial meme, these are reported either internally or to the media directly. The ‘politicians and exiles’ who are used as authoritative sources by journalists represent a selection step – they take up the meme from the intelligence agency and replicate it, but in doing so they also change it slightly. They take out the cautious, qualifying aspects of the language and keep the most eye catching, dramatic statements because it serves their political interest. The newsroom environments which report these stories are also exercising a

selection pressure and it is one which according to Davies (2009) is very conducive to the replication of propaganda planted there by external sources. They are beset by what he referred to as 'churnalism'. This is the result of an increase in news copy produced and a decrease in time afforded to journalists to investigate their stories, forcing news workers to 'churn' out material which is not properly fact checked. The ideal selective role which a free press is supposed to perform – selecting facts and reporting stories based on their truth – is not being performed.

As this process of replication repeats itself, various factors within the nature of news values – such as the desire for attention grabbing headlines and the lack of impetus to challenge the accuracy of stories once they have gained the status of accepted facts – combine to evolve stories in a direction which facilitates the propagation of particular ideas and associated narratives. The news media thus become reasonable candidates for propaganda 'vehicles', not simply in the figurative sense, but in the memetic sense of a unit for the protection and promotion of replicators. They take memes of propaganda into their structure, which are then protected by journalists' "symbiotic relationship" (Castelló and Montagut, 2010:507) with PR operatives and they use their internal resources to facilitate the propagation of those memes across the globe. The complexity of the institutional structures which make up the traditional news media also conforms to Blackmore's (1999) tentative endorsement of the vehicle concept in terms of the massive ideological and institutional constructs of politics and organised religion.

Note that this should not be taken to imply that the memes such as the intelligence estimates on Iraq's WMD were altered and distorted through random mutation rather than deliberate attempts by vested interests to spread disinformation, but that those very interests constitute a selection pressure which caused those alterations to be made. The denial of human agency as a selection pressure within memetic variation is a common misconception about memetic theory which can stem from too close an adherence to the meme/gene analogy and which assumes that random mutation is the only way in which to alter the replicator sequence. Whilst random mutation such as typographical or translation errors are a possible cause of memetic variation, only a minority of scholars such as Nick Rose (1998) have cited them as the *only* possible cause, in Rose's case as a consequence of the belief that the introduction of any human agency would render memetic theory Lamarckian. This error has already been discussed in Chapter 1 in reference to the meme/phenotype distinction as well as in previous sections of this chapter. Even Blackmore, who for the most part aggressively minimises human agency, allows for the possibility of "memetic engineering" in the context of the deliberate spread of religious memes, comparing it explicitly to "propaganda and

marketing" (1999:193). Daniel Dennett goes even further, arguing that even within genetic evolution "both unconscious and methodical selection are just special cases of the more general natural selection" (2003:How We Captured Reasons and Made Them Our Own). In terms of cultural evolution he notes that:

The first memes were naturally selected, paving the way for unconsciously selected memes...followed by methodically selected memes...[and today] memetic engineering is a major human enterprise: the attempt to design and spread whole systems of culture, ethical theories, political ideologies, systems of justice and government. (ibid)

Political bias within the selection of stories and facts in the news is a key concern for those who favour a structural model of propaganda. Herman and Chomsky's (1988) Propaganda Model is possibly the best known of these. Despite his own reservations about their conception of journalists and some of the technical aspects of their theory, Davies' (2009) explanation for the rise of churnalism is remarkably similar in that both rely on the notion that the news media is structured in a way which influences the nature of the news produced. Whilst Davies' (2009) main concern is that these structures have been degraded by commercialism to the point at which the media no longer function as effective guardians of truth, Herman and Chomsky's (1988) concern is the institutionally determined elite bias which such structures produce in their news reporting.

Stuart Allan notes that propaganda is "broadly equivalent with dominant ideology" in Herman and Chomsky's model (2004:52) but this is not strictly accurate. The authors contend that the coverage of certain topics and the framing of the news media within the US, exhibits a level of bias which would be expected in a society dominated by a centralised system of state propaganda such as existed in the USSR – yet none exists (although recent revelations about National Security Association (NSA) wiretapping suggest that on some level Herman and Chomsky may have underestimated the role of state surveillance (see, Lee, 2006)). They demonstrate this with a combination of statistical and qualitative analyses of news reporting and explain it via their structural model which has since been extended to cover reporting in market oriented news systems around the world including the UK (Klaehn, 2005, Edwards and Cromwell, 2009). The authors contend that the economic structure of the media in such systems produces filters which ensure that certain topics are avoided. This could be because they are expensive to research or because of the risk of causing embarrassing repercussions in terms of lost advertising revenue and law suits. However other topics and stories, ones which fall within the elite consensus can be pursued aggressively, giving the false impression that the press is functioning as an effective watchdog.

This process of structural selection by filters corresponds neatly with a memetic analysis – ironically given Daniel Dennett’s (1996) observation that Chomsky has been sceptical of evolutionary explanations for both consciousness and the language organ within his linguistics work. Susan Blackmore in fact describes the memeplex, a category which can include the institutional bureaucracies of the news media, as having “a kind of boundary or filter that divides it from the outside world” (1999:231). It is that system of filtering which is responsible for shaping the kind of systemic, society wide myths and themes of propaganda identified both by structural methods such as the propaganda model, and by more thematic analyses including those undertaken by Ellul (1973) and O’Shaughnessy (2004). Crucially within the Propaganda Model these structural trends are not the product of an individual organisation or conspiracy, as with the evolutionary systems Dawkins (2006a) describes, the ‘watchmaker’ which designs this form of propaganda lies in the interplay of environmental forces and replicator selection, rather than a god or tyrant orchestrating the situation from on high. As a structural model it incorporates human agency, for example within the organised production of flak in response to a story which transgresses the elite consensus, but the theory prioritises structural factors in explaining the macro level implications for the news industry as a whole. As a consequence even the worst instances of propaganda where the memes being replicated are deliberate political lies, can be dispersed by the news media without individual journalists necessarily believing they are serving the goals of the political elite.

This section has detailed a form of design by selection which is already well documented within the literature within the academic study of journalism and propaganda. However for the memetic scholar such selection is unlikely to be limited to these institutional mechanisms. Forms of selection, social, political, economic, technological and institutional would be the expected norm, with the specific configuration of such factors forming the ‘memetic ecosystem’ in which individual memes compete to be replicated. The environmental factors in any evolutionary theory are crucial, especially when applied to a specific case study and thus the notion of the memetic environment as an aspect of the propaganda campaign is likely to figure significantly in this research.

Conclusion: Design for propagation

The memetic view of propaganda is one which unifies and incorporates elements from many of the disparate perspectives on the subject. It rejects the popular assumption that propaganda is necessarily synonymous with deception or manipulation, but does not assume propaganda to be inherently benign or powerless. The techniques which have been detailed in the literature on

propaganda are not restricted to those used by professional propagandists or impassioned political ideologues. They are dispersed throughout normal human interaction and conversation and can be used to spread useful information as well as self-serving fabrications. As a consequence it is necessary when analysing propaganda, to consider which ideas are being propagated by the interaction of technique and environment and to make moral judgements based on what is being propagated and how, not simply on the fact that propaganda is in use.

Propaganda for the memeticist describes the manifold ways in which memes can be designed to facilitate the propagation of ideas and actions throughout a society – including by acting as emissaries, facilitating the incremental replication of memeplexes such as doctrines or ideologies which are too large to replicate as a single unit. This notion of design is not restricted to deliberate design by an individual; although unlike some on the fringe of memetic theory the approach taken in this study does not rule it out. Design from an evolutionary perspective extends to anything which has been shaped to perform a function, in the case of propaganda, the function of spreading ideas and actions. This holds true irrespective of whether or not the design is the result of methodical or unintentional natural selection. The kind of market oriented structural analyses undertaken by scholars such as Herman and Chomsky (1988), can be seen as identifying a form of propaganda via unintentional selection, as opposed to the techniques deliberately chosen by PR professionals, such as those identified by Miller and Dinan (2008) or Lee and Lee (1939). In fact the two modes can work in tandem; they are simply different perspectives on the same process – the differential replication of political ideas and actions.

Ideas, actions and the techniques used to facilitate their propagation can all be considered memes - replicators taking part in an evolutionary race. As such the major prediction that memetics would make about propaganda is that whilst it may continue to display common elements such as playing on people's emotions or psychological vulnerabilities, the specific techniques it uses are likely to change depending on their environment. It is also likely that they will evolve as time and technology progress in order to exploit new opportunities for replication which such changes produce. When analysing propaganda from a memetic perspective it is these two concepts, the techniques which can help a meme to propagate more successfully, and the nature of the environment in which it propagates which are the most crucial. As Ellul pointed out in 1965, the modern social environment is dominated by the technology of communication – at the time of his writing principally radio, mass circulation newspapers, television and cinema. In the current social environment digital media and online communication have become widespread. For the memetic conception of propaganda this

suggests a period of change in which new techniques for the propagation of ideas will emerge. Thus the next chapter will examine the evolution of the digital election campaign as this aspect of propaganda is specifically relevant to the 2010 election case study which will be addressed in Chapters 5-8.

Chapter Three: The Evolution of the Internet Campaign

Whilst it may be a novel approach to look at propaganda through evolutionary lenses, the notion is less unusual when addressing the massive changes in communications technology which have taken place over the past two decades. Meikle and Young (2012) for example characterise new media technology in the language of competition and selection, emphasising the role these evolutionary concepts have had in the rise of the Internet, the Web and finally Web 2.0. Similarly Jonathan Zittrain (2008) refers to evolution repeatedly (if a-theoretically) to describe technological change over time. These developments have brought new avenues of communication to campaign propagandists - new means by which a campaign's memes can spread and replicate within the minds of the electorate. The evolution of the online campaign from its early adopters in the US to the contemporary ubiquity of the political Web presence is the story of an on-going transition from the Internet as an additional one way communications platform, to a complex network through which campaign memes can be replicated and subject to their own evolutionary changes. The increased interactivity which has marked the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has not lived up to the predictions of democratic utopia with which the notion was originally greeted (at least by some), but interactivity has played an important role in the evolution of campaign propaganda. The techniques by which online and digital technologies can be effectively utilised by political campaigns have already become institutionalised within specialised professional agencies who have been employed in both US and UK electoral races (Benjamin, 2011, Merron, 2010, Howard, 2003). The principal technique which has arisen out of these convergent evolutionary processes is 'copy me' - the notion that an effectively crafted brand message can be replicated by a campaign's support base, producing new campaign memes (or alternative variations of existing ones) and adapting them to specific demographic environments (Roach, 2006, Trippi, 2004, Plouffe, 2009).

This chapter will trace the recent evolution of the online political campaign beginning with its early adoption in the US during the 1990s. As the relative dearth of Internet users in the early years of Web campaigning was cited as reason for the political scepticism in the medium, the second section will explore the digital divide and its relationship to the evolution of the online campaign. It will then turn to the spread and development of campaigning within the UK as this will be the setting for the upcoming case study. Finally a closer look will be taken at the online campaign in the context of Web 2.0 and the rise of Social Networking Applications (SNAs) such as Facebook and YouTube. It will conclude by noting that digital propaganda has been evolving towards a system which turns some of

the initial drawbacks of the Web as a medium into advantages for parties which can use them effectively, for example by utilising the tendency of party pages to attract those already likely to vote for a party to recruit additional supporters who can create and distribute memes on the party's behalf.

The USA: Early adopters of digital campaigning

The USA has pioneered the use of Web based and Internet campaign tools over the past two decades. According to Rachel Gibson (2004) 'cyber campaigning' in the US can be traced back as far as the presidential elections of 1992 with Internet based technologies such as email in use for internal communication since the early 1990s. By 1996 the adoption of webpages as a medium for distributing campaign literature was widespread with every major candidate for Republican presidential nominee boasting their own webpage (D'Alessio, 2000:556). This early adoption in the US is reflected in the literature and it was already the subject of considerable research by the turn of the millennium (D'Alessio, 2000, Cornfield, 2000, Westen, 1998, Berghet, 2000, Dutton et al., 1999). By contrast Challen's (2001) paper for *The Journal of Public Affairs* was amongst the earliest pieces published on UK digital campaigning. It argued that although there was a potential for great changes in political communication to stem from the more widespread use of the Internet by politicians, these were yet to be really felt in the UK. This was later followed by a conference paper on Internet polling by Sanders et al in 2002.

According to D'Alessio "most studies [in the mid to late 1990's] focus[ed] on [Web]sites" (2000:557) which were often criticised for two principal failings; lack of interactivity and 'shovelware'. Berghet (2000) observed that many of these early political sites were simply digital billboards conveying information about a candidate with little or no means for citizens to engage in meaningful debate either with the campaign staff, political candidates or with each other. The information too, he argues, was simply shovelware - the same campaign literature available offline but in an electronic format. This problem was not limited to the US experience of the early digital campaign as Jackson (2003) points out in his analysis of adoption within the UK. These failings can be seen to stem from a lack of imagination on the part of the campaigns in terms of the potentials of the new technology and the desire to control their online message. In fact the potential of the Web to provide a channel of communication with voters which was unfiltered by the news media was seen as one of its potential benefits from the campaign perspective (Jackson, 2003, D'Alessio, 2000, Stromer-Galley, 2000).

Tracy Westen's (1998) early work on the US experience of Internet democracy took another approach. Rather than looking at individual candidates' websites she focused her research on an

independent site: *The Democracy Network*. This was a pilot project which allowed citizens to compare candidate's policy positions via an online grid. As a political comparison site it was not dissimilar to the contemporary <<http://www.theyworkforyou.com>> - which allows UK citizens to identify and contact their MP as well as access data on their voting record in the House of Commons. The early US variation however was specifically designed for use during elections; it allowed candidates to provide official positions on various topics and also contact information so that voters could get in touch with a campaign and find out more about a candidate's position. The initial success and the potential of direct communication with candidates caused Western to argue (somewhat prematurely) that such technology could 'save democracy'. However *The Democracy Network* still relied on the willingness of multiple political campaigns engaging with the site and multiple engaged citizens to seek it out. In an echo of the 'shovelware' criticism levelled at the websites themselves, many of the responses from the candidates' campaigns turned out to be little more than cut and paste information from campaign websites rather than quality engagement, as campaigns' felt too much focus on online communication was a waste of resources, given the lack of people with an Internet connection available.

D'Alessio claims that adoption of webpages in the US during the late 1990s can be seen largely as the function of a cost benefit analysis, a perspective which explains the correlation found in his study between a campaign's income and its willingness to use Web technology. Income was described as a "stronger and more direct indicator" of the likelihood that a campaign would establish a website than for example number of constituents. He also observed that "costs played a larger role in the adoption decisions than the benefits" (2000:565), arguing that the costs of setting up a website are more easily quantified than the benefits which can only be judged, if at all, after the election has taken place. This makes digital expenditure an unknown risk compared to 'tried and tested' media such as television and radio. Proportionately such expenditure is larger for those campaigns with smaller overall budget and therefore may have appeared a more risky investment. The success of the more interactive campaign tool addressed by Westen (1998) can also be seen in this light. By providing a grid which identified candidates who had not used the site to publicise their position on a topic, *The Democracy Network* provided a demonstrable cost to not engaging with this more interactive tool (providing their opponents were using it), as it is poor politics to remain silent on a topic with which opponents are publically engaged.

In evolutionary terms this competitive adoption is referred to as an arms race or 'red queen process' (Blackmore, 1999, Dawkins, 2006b, Dennett, 1996); an adaptation or evolutionary change takes place, not because of its independent benefits, but because of its relative benefits in an environment

which includes others competing for the same resource. Trees in the rainforest grow to great heights despite the energy costs involved because they have evolved in an environment dominated by other trees, all of which need sunlight to produce energy. Those trees which are tall enough *relative to all of those surrounding them*, break the canopy and get more of that resource than their competitors, this energy bonus makes them better at replicating the genes which made them taller. This is a process of differential replication in which success is achieved not by being 'as tall as possible', but by being slightly taller than the trees which surround you. It is possible that the same kind of process is at work when competing candidates make the decision to adopt new media campaign tools; once some campaigns have an online platform with which to reach voters who use the Internet, those who do not will be pressured to adopt such tools in order to reduce the relative advantage of their opponents, however unless there is a specific enthusiasm for the use of digital campaign tools, this kind of pressure will not force campaigns to embrace such tools beyond the extent required to keep pace with their competitors. However the pressure to utilise such means of communication also increases in tandem with the number of voters using digital media and the proportion of voters reachable via the Internet has done nothing but increase since initial US adoption in the early 90s.

The digital divide

The notion that the adoption of the Internet and the Web as campaign tools should increase alongside the number of voters with access to those technologies is a supposition generally substantiated within the literature (Gibson, 2004, D'Alessio, 2000). In the early years of online campaigning only a tiny fraction of the global population had access to the Web; Figure 4 (p.70) outlines US and UK trends in Internet use from 2000 to 2012¹⁰.

According to data from the International Telecommunications Union (2013); the Internet was used by only 0.05% of the global population, 0.78% of the US population and 0.09% of the UK population back in 1990. Ten years later those figures had increased to 6.46%, 43.08% and 26.82% respectively. In 2011, the last year for which complete data is available as of October 2012, global Internet access stood at 32.35% with the UK outstripping US connection rates by 82% to 77.86%. This may indicate that early figures cited within the literature on online campaigning, such as the suggestion that "as early as 1996, 4% of Americans of voting age had used Web browsers to visit political sites" (D'Alessio, 2000:556) overplayed the Internet's significance.

Despite these issues it is clear that the number of people in the US and UK who could potentially be the target of online campaign propaganda has increased significantly over the past two decades,

¹⁰ Further statistics are available online via the International Telecommunications Union (2013) but are not available to download. Full statistics for Figures 4 and 5 can be found in Appendix M.

giving politicians more reason to utilise Internet based technologies within their campaigns. These increases are reflected less dramatically in the global trend; Figure 5 (p.70) disaggregates the global figure from 2005-2014 into the statistics for the developed and developing world highlighting the issue of the digital divide¹¹.

The digital divide is the relative proportion of technology use between two groups – it could include multiple forms of technology such as mobile phone and PC use or a single measure such as Internet use. For example Jeffrey James’ analysis of global Internet use identifies two measures of the digital divide, the relative divide is “the ratio of information technology stock [e.g. Internet]...in the developed countries to the stock in developing countries” and the absolute divide as “the stock of Internet users per 100 inhabitants in rich countries minus the stock in developing countries” (2011:121). However it should be noted that, as Epstein et al. point out, the definition of the term is contested and more broadly it has come to refer to any “persistent gaps between developed and developing nations, as well as gaps domestically along socioeconomic, geographic, educational, racial, and gender lines” (2011:92).

Whilst the global divide is significant when discussing the generalised relationship between Internet usage and democratic trends, when addressing the relationship between the Internet and campaign propaganda the digital divisions within the voting population in terms of, gender, race, income and education become more relevant. Challen noted that research in both the UK specifically and Europe in general pointed towards an income divide at the beginning of the new millennium with “as few as 3 per cent of poorer households...online, compared to 48 per cent of more affluent households” (2001:257). A more recent study by Jörn Lengsfeld (2011) which includes data from a wider variety of countries as well as socio-demographic indicators, concludes that age, education and occupation are all significant factors in the digital divide. Broadly speaking the young and the affluent have always been the easiest voters to reach via the Internet, but the dramatic increase in Internet access appears to have begun to close the gaps identified in earlier research, at least within the developed world; the Lengsfeld study for example, suggests that gender is no longer a significant factor in Internet usage. As these gaps have narrowed the potential of the Internet to become a significant, influential factor within the representative democratic process has increased.

¹¹ The developed/developing country classifications are based on the UN M49 as reported by the International Telecommunications Union (2012a), World Telecommunication /ICT Indicators database

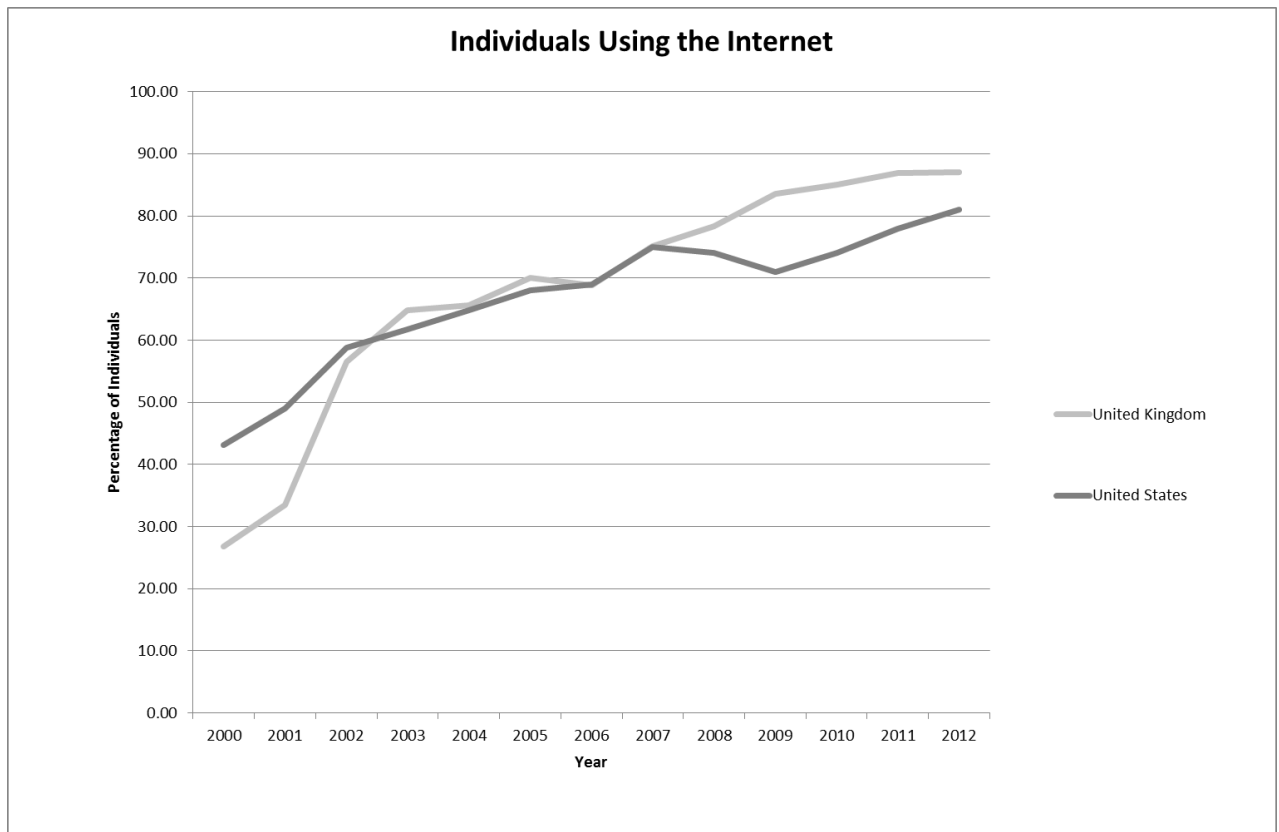


Figure 4: US and UK Internet Access Rate

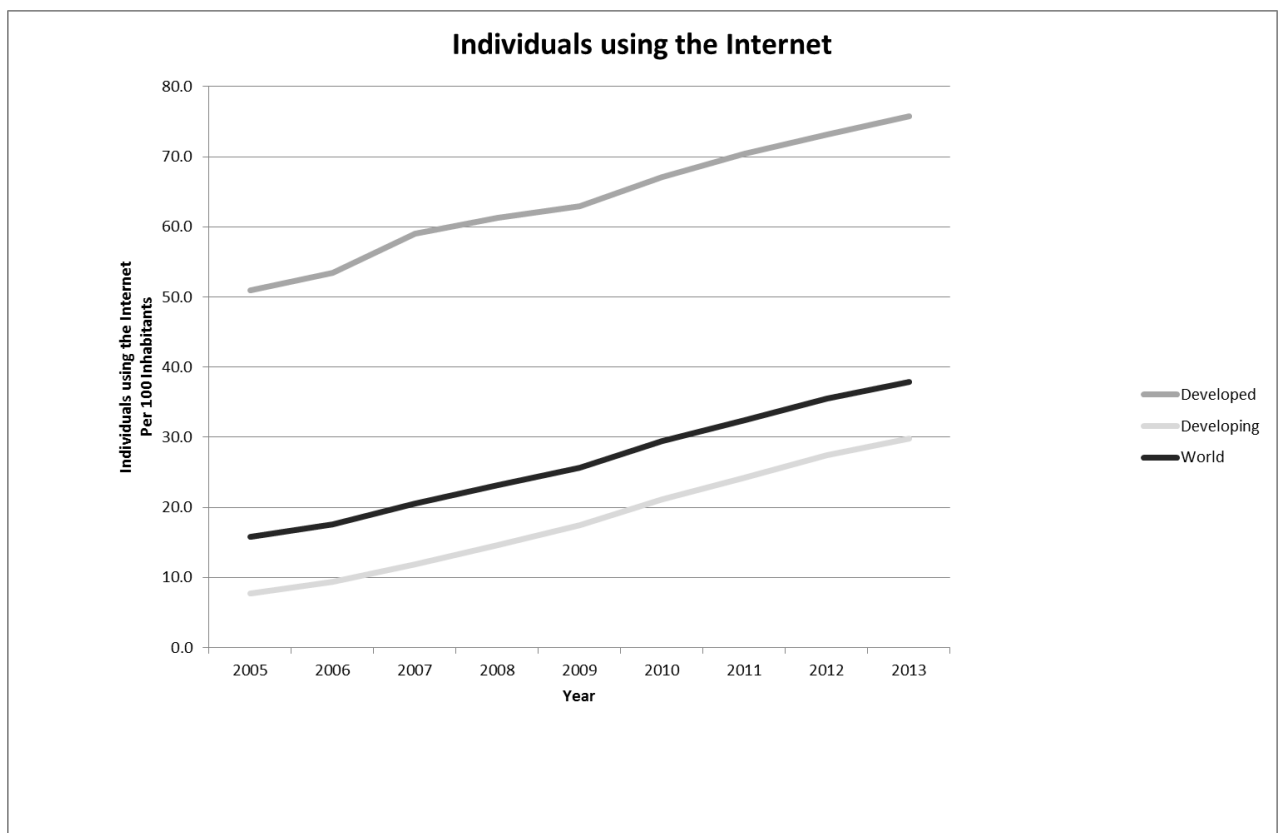


Figure 5: The Digital Divide

From cyber utopians versus cyber cynics to punctuated evolution

Scott Wright (2012) has argued that the academic debate surrounding online communication has been characterised by a false dichotomy between the cyber-utopians - who argue that the Internet has revolutionary, democratic potential - and cyber cynics (or cyber-realists) who argue that this new technology will simply be a more technically advanced medium for politics as usual. He argues that even those who can be seen as cyber cynics are bounded by the utopian logic which greeted the early convergence between representative democracy and Internet based technologies. The early literature from the 1990s and early 2000s discussed in the previous section appears to validate this criticism. Even Berghet (2000), who argued that there were little or no visible improvements in the use of technology by politicians between 1994 and 2000 and that the medium risked creating shallow engagement and the proliferation of political spam, addresses these issues from a quasi-utopian perspective. The technology, he implied, holds within it the capacity for great revolutionary potential, for a more direct, interactive form of democratic engagement. However the political class did not take advantage of such possibilities either because they lacked the imagination, or because such 'true' democracy represents a greater shift of power from the politicians to the citizenry than they were willing to tolerate. Interestingly research into the 2002 Dutch elections by Boogers and Voerman indicated that, at least during this relatively early period of Web campaigning, information is what most visitors to candidate and party websites were seeking, and where "websites...offered...interactive possibilities...they were only used sporadically" (2003:25), suggesting that citizens too may be sceptical about the benefits of greater interaction with politicians.

Using a language which is very familiar to a scholar of memetics, Wright (2012) follows Colin Hay in arguing for the abandonment of the utopian/cynic, revolution/normalisation framework in favour of an approach referred to by Hay as "punctuated evolution" (2002:163). This is the notion that a process of change by small, cumulative steps can be interspersed periodically by episodes of much faster change; possibly as the result of crisis or the convergence of multiple socio-economic, political and technological factors. Unlike the revolution/normalisation debate which Wright (2012) outlined in specific reference to the evolution of communications technology, punctuated evolution can be applied to a wide range of political and social changes. This allows it to better incorporate the non-technological variables which are inevitably missing from a framework such as the revolution/normalisation approach which Wright criticises as technologically deterministic. With respect to the impact of technology on democracy, Wright argues that Hay's punctuated evolution approach has the advantage of being able to appreciate incremental changes to established

practices and what he calls 'normalised revolutions' in which "technologies create deeply significant, perhaps wholesale changes to the function of established political institutions" (ibid:253) without overthrowing or replacing them. This will be demonstrated in more detail in subsequent sections with respect to the US presidential elections. In particular the 2008 election in which communications practices developed over multiple election cycles converged with economic and political factors, the result of which was to make Obama the archetypal Internet candidate.

Pippa Norris (2004, 2000) also argues for an evolutionary understanding of changes within election campaigning which encompasses much more than the changes which have taken place since the rise of the Internet and the Web. She places the Internet in the most recent post-Modern stage of campaign evolution characterised by a fragmented electorate and highly influential PR professionals whose importance is equal to that of politicians. Similar to the pre-Modern Campaign the post-Modern also has an increased level of grassroots participation but without such strong party loyalties and with a reduction in the significance of the mediating press, due to the ease of direct communication with supporters. The Modern campaign saw the rise of the professional media advisor, a reduction in party political activism and a mediation by television - although Norris (2000) emphasises that assumed links between consumption of television news and increased public apathy and cynicism about the institutions of democracy, run counter to statistical evidence even during the Modern period.

Norris (2000) argues that some of the changes often called Americanisation in Political Communication literature, can be understood as a consequence of similar alterations within the affected societies due to parallel processes of technological and socio-structural change, (although she is at pains to point out that the model should not imply a linear movement from pre-modern to post-modern). Within a dichotomous structure/agency approach this may appear to run counter to a memetic model of evolutionary change, with Norris' model emphasising the structural factors of political culture and technology and memetics focusing on the pseudo-agency of the replicated meme. However the two models are not as incompatible as it may at first seem; for example, if a campaign technique is piloted in the US, observed by campaigners in the UK and replicated in the next UK general election, that is an example of memetic replication. However, if the environment in the US which made that technique a success is characteristic of the Post-Modern campaign, but the UK environment is still largely a Modern one, the technique is unlikely to produce the same results.

The problem from a memetic perspective with Norris' evolutionary model of campaigning is not the false dichotomy between structure and agency but a simpler, almost semantic one. A tripartite model of epochal change holds no room for *continuous* evolution - at least without the prospect of an endless series of 'post' prefixes in addition to Post-Modern. The criticism which Negrine (2008) makes of Norris' epochal approach - that it discounts the power of gradual and incremental change - is resolved within memetic theory by Dennett (1996) in reference to biological evolution. The distinction between a gradualist and an epochal evolutionary approach is simply timescale. What may appear over the perspective of a century of election campaigning as a series of radical shifts in the nature of the campaign appears on a scale of a few decades, or on the scale of day to day political engagement, as a gradual progression. Additionally, even with the rise of the permanent campaign, which Norris identifies as a characteristic of the post-Modern epoch, the official campaign period is still a time of 'crisis' to use the terminology of Hay's (2002) model of punctuated evolution. There is an increased focus by the media on campaign activity during election time, more direct advertising and greater engagement in politics by the public, therefore campaign techniques which have been quietly developed in the inter-election period, suddenly become newsworthy, potentially giving the appearance of radical changes in campaign strategy which have appeared overnight.

In terms of the use of Internet and Web technologies as campaign tools, the Obama campaign could provide an example of this apparently epochal change as a result of convergence, although like all forms of evolution, punctuated or gradual, antecedents to this change can be found throughout the preceding years. An outsider candidate who had learned the lessons of Howard Dean's ultimately unsuccessful Internet focused campaign, fighting opponents in both the Democratic primary and the general election from well inside the political establishment and facing an electorate whose huge dissatisfaction with a failing economy and the Iraq war, was matched, not by apathy, but by an increased political engagement, especially amongst the young. This convergence of political, technological and economic factors is why Kathleen Barr (2009) referred to the US youth vote in 2008 as a 'perfect storm'. Barr argues that the seeds for Obama's success can be identified in the previous election cycle with an already measurable increase in voter turnout amongst the young. However a widening of the timescale can trace elements of the Obama strategy back much further, suggesting a process of punctuated evolution in which disparate, gradual changes have accumulated and then converged on a specific candidate.

From progress to hope: Evolving Obama

It is tempting to see the masterful utilisation of new media by Obama for America (OFA) in 2008 as a radical alteration in US campaign history - the first election in which the Internet proved a decisive factor. Not only this, but, as the cyber-utopians had predicted, OFA's use of online campaign tools circumvented a long established problem within American electoral politics: the way in which the spiralling costs of the political campaign have traditionally pressured politicians to rely heavily on contributions from corporate and political lobbyists. Despite a raft of legislation designed to prevent this, the impression still remains that the campaign funding structure serves to increase the power of the wealthy within the political process (Young, 2012, Palast, 2004, Donovan and Bowler, 2003). Obama's use of networked social media and email lists as fundraising tools enabled his campaign to raise and spend more money than any other political campaign in American history (Johnson, 2009). Many of these contributions came from vast numbers of ordinary citizens giving in small amounts, a fact which was utilised effectively by Obama's campaign staff to emphasise the democratic legitimacy provided by their reliance on an active grassroots support base (Johnson, 2009, Plouffe, 2009). Despite these distinctions from politics as usual, the evidence from the literature supports a more evolutionary perspective rather than seeing Obama's campaign as a spontaneous revolutionary change, isolated from political history. In fact OFA simply exploited the tools of the online campaign which had been available for some time more effectively than their rivals and predecessors.

The 2000 and 2004 presidential races

The most immediate pre-cursor to OFA's success was the 2003/4 Howard Dean Primary campaign. Dean rose from being a practically unknown candidate in the early stages of the Democratic Primaries, to become a serious contender for the nomination. The achievements of his campaign were attributed by his campaign manager Joe Trippi (2004) to a successful use of new media to co-ordinate a widespread and active, grassroots support base. Gibson describes Dean's campaign strategy of "viral politics" as "more fruitful" than untargeted spam but raised questions about whether it could be successfully deployed given Deans "crushing defeat in the primaries" (2004:177). Specifically these 'viral' tactics were used as fundraising tools in order to gather campaign contributions from supporters. In addition personal interaction between supporters and campaign staff via the candidate's message board and <http://www.meetup.com> fostered a close relationship between active supporters and the candidate himself. However it has been argued that some of these strategies were present in previous campaigns. Simple requests for time and money were two of the 'shallow' interactive features criticised by Berghet (2000) at the turn of the millennium, as were the use of email lists to contact supporters. John McCain, who would later face

Barack Obama in the 2008 Presidential election, reportedly used the Web as a successful fundraising tool during his unsuccessful bid for Republican nomination back in 2000. Although it should be noted that whilst initial estimates suggested McCain had amassed millions of dollars in this way, critics argued much of this money had been obtained via telephone canvassing with financial details processed via the website (Gibson, 2004:98).

Dean's campaign was infamously, even ostentatiously chaotic and decentralised (Trippi, 2004, Davis, 2005) with volunteers expected to organise their efforts with little support or co-ordination from a central hierarchy. Whilst this may have been touted as a benefit by Trippi (2004), it is notable that not only the eventual Presidential contenders Bush and Kerry, but also the Obama campaign in 2008, rejected this approach in favour of what Davis refers to as a "command-and-control operation" (2005:243). By contrast the aspects of the Dean campaign which were very successful, such as the use of high levels of interaction between campaigners and candidates and the use of peer to peer campaign tools (i.e. those which allowed supporters to communicate directly with each other), were retained and improved upon. Highly detailed quantitative research by Shah et al (2007) led the authors to argue that online political discussion sits within a complex model of communication between citizens and elites which crosses the boundaries of news and advertising as well as those of print, broadcast and online media. Their research confirms the idea that online peer to peer communication between citizens corresponds significantly with both civic and political engagement. Davis also points out that "Dean's candidacy brought many new people to the process...[who] were very active...online...[and] vow that they will stay involved in politics in the future" (2005:243).

It is possible to discern an evolutionary pattern in the progress of the online campaign where initial ideas - which are also, of course memes - are retained, rejected or built upon. This is cumulative selection with respect to the techniques of propaganda themselves as referred to in Chapter 2; those aspects of a campaign which did not serve in the earlier stages or in previous campaigns are rejected, whilst those which were seen to have a positive effect are retained and improved upon. For example, Bush's campaign team enabled activists to communicate with high level campaign staff via "online chats" in a similar manner to Dean's campaign, but also added a e-volunteer leader-board to their site, thus using competition to encourage activists to complete more campaign tasks (Vaccari, 2008:655). Vaccari also notes that other previously used campaign tools such as the 'cut and paste' emails criticised by Berghet (2000) were still employed by both the Bush and Kerry campaigns, suggesting that however 'shallow' this form of participation may be, the campaigns using them did find them effective - although interviewees from the Kerry campaign pointed out that flooding newspaper offices with too many identical letters could be counterproductive if the aim

was to have those letters published, rather than simply to impress editors with the size of your online support base. It should also be noted that such tools did not exist in isolation as lone examples of interactivity within the online campaigns as was the case at the time of Berghet's (2000) criticism. By 2004 they existed as part of a collection of measures which emphasised personalised communication and user involvement.

It is this notion which is the principal development of the interactive digital campaign; the use of the Web's tendency to capture those who already supportive (Norris, 2003) and to mobilise that support base into an army of active campaigners. Those campaigners can both replicate your talking points and modify them, thus giving them the authenticity of personalisation. This is the essence of the variety of propaganda techniques collectively referred to as 'copy me' techniques. 'Copy me' was arguably present even in the early 'cut and paste' email applications so derided by Berghet (2000) and can still be seen in 2008, in the emails sent out to Obama supporters in which they were encouraged to contact local papers with Pro-Obama material. Although now, as the Democratic National Committee's New Media director Natalie Foster revealed in an interview, "we just provide bullet points so that when people compose the letters, they speak from the heart" (Dempsey, 2010:63). In this we can see the incorporation of the 'persuasive chain' noted by Pardo (2001) into the successful US approach to the digital campaign as well as the amalgamation of a central hierarchy and a distributed support base to produce a hybridised campaign structure.

Into Web 2.0

The increase in interactivity which could be seen in the 2004 US election cycle can be seen as the initial stages of Web campaigning in the 2.0 or 'truly' interactive Web. Web 2.0 describes the move after the bursting of the first dotcom bubble, towards a new and more successful online business model "built around database management, customization, personalisation, automation and participatory affordances for users" (Meikle and Young, 2012:66). Whilst some, including Meikle and Young criticise the 2.0 postfix on the grounds that these developments - in particular the greater degree of user generated content - are in fact "a more fully achieved Web 1.0" (ibid:65) rather than something radically new. However, these semantic objections do not override the notion that the evolution of better Web and Internet technology, combined with a reduction in the digital divide have changed the nature of digital communication since the early years of online political campaigning. Given the observation by Political Communications scholars such as Franklin (2004:chapters 4-5) that politics and policy have increasingly become products to be sold by

professional marketers and PR operatives, it should not surprise us that the business model described in relation to online media concerns should be reflected in the political campaign.

The use of vast databases of information on citizens, supporters and volunteers for example can be seen in this light (Howard, 2003). Although they were in evidence in 2004 it was during Obama's campaign that they came to true prominence. Campaign manager David Plouffe described Obama for America's vast email list as like having "our own television network" (2009:364), a surprisingly top-down vision of communication when compared to the dispersed, democratised model championed by Joe Trippi in 2004. In fact the successful online campaigns appear to be a synthesis between the traditional command and control operations and the decentralised model piloted by the Dean campaign. Despite Davis (2005) observation that the Bush and Kerry operations remained truer to the traditional model than the Trippi approach, Vaccari's more detailed analysis suggests that there was a growing acceptance of the need to relinquish control of the form, if not the content of their message in the context of the contemporary online campaign. He quotes an anonymous Kerry campaigner as claiming: "[t]he lack of control is part of the nature of the technology. If you want to control it, then do not do something online" (2008:661).

This perspective on the delivery of a candidate's message is an all but perfect reflection of the arguments advanced by Tom Roach (2006) in the PR industry publication *Campaign* when he proposed a memetic approach to digital marketing. In an article which received praise from high ranking individuals within leading firms such as Saatchi and Saatchi, Roach suggests that the future of marketing lies in "brand co-creation" where a base of highly engaged consumers are enlisted to further the evolution of a brand message in an organisation's interests. In his vision "the brand owners would literally play the part of 'god' in the process - setting up the memetic algorithm and stepping back to let increasingly better adapted memes evolve from the bottom-up" (2006).

On paper such an idea may seem fanciful and the language suggests an alarming if perhaps unrealistic acquisition of power by brand owners. One particularly notable (and potentially deceptive) aspect of it is the distance between the 'god' like brand owners and the general public created by the expanding chain of 'better adapted memes' as the influence of the hierarchy and the involvement of professional propagandists may be obscured by the involvement of the citizenry. However, an examination of the unofficial, and quasi-official branding which surrounded Obama's campaign can give a clearer perspective on what this kind of 'persuasive chain' would look like in practice.

Obama's pop-cultural memes

In his forward to Hal E. Wert's (2009) collection of poster's and prints inspired by Obama for America (OFA), Ray Noland argues that during the Obama campaign, "the culture that existed beyond the bounds of official messaging and branding took on a powerful life of its own". It began with graffiti artist Shepard Fairey who contacted the Obama campaign and offered to produce a piece of art celebrating his candidacy. The original design dubbed 'PROGRESS' featured the eventually ubiquitous red, white and blue colour scheme and the distinctive block colour design in the style of a Soviet Union propaganda poster. It was captioned with the title and with Fairey's signature 'Obey' logo prominently featured. After consultation with OFA a second variation 'HOPE' was produced, minus the artist's logo. The image became possibly the most recognisable symbol of the campaign, the easy availability of an electronic version meant that it soon inspired a myriad of variations, such as Sarah Palin, John McCain and even Obama captioned 'NOPE', respectively subverting the tone and the message of the original image (Linthicum, 2008). Although there was the potential for the image to spawn 'off message' variations of this kind, the ubiquity of the meme was arguably a massive success for Obama in propaganda terms. Even *Mad Magazine's* Alfred E. Neuman (captioned HOPELESS) played a part in replicating this little piece of Obama branding. However, according to Wert (2009), Fairey's highly successful meme was only the most recognisable example of a much wider Pro-Obama art movement which took on and replicated the candidate's messages of 'hope' and 'change'. Interestingly, whilst the form and content of the memes produced within this movement differed wildly, the messages embodied in these two simple slogans remained relatively consistent and were replicated throughout the persuasive chain alongside images of Obama reproduced in various artistic styles and media.

In terms of memetic theory, what Fairey's poster provides us with is an example of what Blackmore (1999) calls a 'copy the instructions' meme - in which a meme contains within it implicit or explicit instructions for making a copy. In this case the boldness of the colour scheme and the simplicity of the blocks of colour combined with the large caption are all you need to create recognisable variations of the original. The variety of alternative phrases and pictures within the poster can be seen as memetic alleles, a concept which Distin (2005) argued for but about which Blackmore (1999) showed more scepticism. In genetics the allele is the alternative gene which could potentially exist at a specific locus on a chromosome to produce a higher statistical likelihood of an alternative phenotypic effect, such as brown eyes instead of blue. In the case of this poster design, the whole poster can be replicated making it a meme, but in addition it can be seen as a memeplex, a set of smaller memes replicating together. Substituting different phrases and words for alternative memes

is what creates the variation in tone and meaning which this form of communication allows for. After the election Paste Magazine (Paste Media Group, 2008) launched an online macro allowing anyone to produce a variation, keeping the striking aesthetic but with the user's choice of image and text. This led to a myriad of political and a-political variations such as the anti-George W Bush 'FAIL' and 'WMD' (captioning a blank page), and the a-political 'FROGRESS' (Kermit the Frog) and 'NEW HOPE' (*Star Wars* characters). By contrast the wider art movement referred to by Wert (2009) could be seen as 'copy the product' replication - with the meme being simply 'create an artwork celebrating Obama' and without such obvious allegories for the allele. Whilst memetic replication can be seen in the spread of such a fashion, the finished works are all unique in a way which cannot be said for the thousands of variations on Shepard Fairey's poster design.

The art movement which surrounded the Obama candidacy was by no means the only type of pop-cultural memes which replicated in his interests during that campaign. Sparkes-Vian ([as Vian], 2011) documented six of the most memorable including viral videos such as Obama girl (a music video to a song called 'I have a crush on Obama') and Vote Different (a pro-Obama reimagining of a 1984 advertisement for Apple computers) as well as efforts by more organised or better known contributors such as *MoveOn.org's*¹² *Obama in 30 Seconds* competition - where participants were invited to design their own Obama campaign commercial - and *The Black Eyed Peas* singer Will.i.am, who set Obama's famous 'Yes We Can' speech to music¹³. This is what Roach (2006) and the anonymous Kerry aide quoted by Vaccari (2008) were talking about when they referred to the possibilities of co-created or uncontrolled online branding perpetuated by a support base, it is also an example of a 'copy me' propaganda technique. Arguably this kind of participatory culture qualifies as the "dramatic and divine 'Internet moment'" (2005:241) which Davis implied was a distracting red herring for those analysing and commenting upon the previous Presidential campaign. However it was not an epochal event standing alone without of historical context, rather is best understood through Hay's (2002) framework of punctuated evolution where dramatic and seemingly sea-changing events can be seen as the product of many years of slow and incremental change, converging in this case on a particular candidate. The next section will explore the British experience of e-politics, arguing that whilst the UK may lack an 'Internet moment' as dramatic as the Obama election, the online campaign is still evolving, albeit at a slower pace.

UK elections

¹² Please note this is a website title not a URL.

¹³ Also known as his New Hampshire Primary concession speech.

Although the USA experienced a greater increase and swifter take up of Web and Internet technologies within their electoral system when compared to the European experience, the rest of the world - the UK included - was not operating in a vacuum during this period. Far from languishing off line and unaware, Gibson et al note that during the 2000 Presidential election "the main UK parties all closely watched the e-campaigns of Bush and Gore and sent campaign staff to the USA to learn from the Bush–Gore experience" (2003:50). This follows the tradition of transatlantic networking between political elites in the US and UK discussed by Miller and Dinan (2008), a tradition which arguably provides implicit support for the argument that the wider trend towards the 'Americanisation' of UK politics is the result of memetic replication. That is, politicians are copying techniques seen in the US and adapting them to their domestic political environments. This is in addition to the independent decisions of politicians in different countries making similar choices when faced with similar situations.

It is unsurprising then that the initial response within the literature on the UK experience of online campaigning largely reflects the criticisms found in the US literature. In a collection of journalistic experiences of the 2001 UK election gathered by the academic journal *Journalism Studies*¹⁴, John Downey argues that the Internet played only "a bit part" (2001:605) in the campaign, whilst Dan Damon limits its impact to "fun for political nerds ...[and]...broadcasters...who had lots of fun playing with their new toys" (ibid:597). Downey indicates that the limitations of the e-campaign in the UK can be attributed to a combination of factors:

1. People have to decide to seek out online information.
2. The people who choose to seek out information have usually already decided who to vote for.
3. People within the political parties who are enthusiastic about the technology do not have a lot of power or influence.
4. Parties are reluctant to utilise the interactive potential of the Internet, for fear of losing control of their message. (ibid:606)

The latter point was particularly attributed to New Labour and associated with the preoccupation with spin which was especially characteristic Tony Blair's leadership period; in the context of the US

¹⁴ This collection of accounts of the 2001 UK election was comprised of independent reports from a selection of journalists who covered the campaign with an introduction written by the anonymous editors of the journal. As no author's name was provided by the journal's online referencing system it has been cited in the bibliography under the name *Journalism Studies (eds)*.

experience the same point was substantiated by Stromer-Galley (2000) in her analysis of candidates websites from 1996 and 1998. Gibson et al (2003) confirm that at the turn of the millennium there was considerable transatlantic parity in terms of how the Web was used, specifically they noted a focus on top-down information provision and relatively little interest in networking or voter participation. Despite their early echo of Wright's (2012) suggestion that an evolutionary rather than revolutionary approach was needed to understand the changes taking place online, it is instructive to note that the content analysis of candidate and party websites could not have been meaningfully repeated in the next election cycle - at least not in the US. The distinct categories used for their analysis such as participation, networking and resource generation would have been cut across entirely by the model of online campaigning popularised by Dean and utilised by both Bush and Kerry in 2004. By contrast analysis of the UK's 2005 campaign by observers such as John Bartle told an almost identical story to 2001 - that the Internet "promised...so much...but...failed to deliver", and was simply another top-down medium which "major parties...used...to distribute propaganda, their manifestos, press releases and leaflets" (2005:710).

Interestingly Smith and Webster's (2004) analysis of attitudes amongst members of the Scottish Parliament - where considerable effort was made to include ICT support from the outset of devolution - suggest a very different attitude amongst SMPs to that suggested by work which has focused on Westminster representatives. The overwhelming response to surveys conducted in 2002 was positive with respect to the benefits of ICT for SMPs working practice and on democracy - scoring above the average when compared with other European Parliaments. By contrast interviews with Westminster MPs suggested that "the Internet and...email, were...rated the least important campaign tools" (Gibson et al., 2003:65) whilst both Jackson (2003) and Challen (2001) re-emphasised the top-down, non-participatory attitude as a possible explanation of why MPs were not getting all they could out of the new technology. Challen is fairly prescient in his analysis of the online recruitment of volunteers, arguing that "an objective of websites must be to encourage users in such a way as to lure them on to a ladder of commitment which would eventually lead them to becoming activists" (ibid:262). This approach would be familiar to the US Presidential campaigners of 2004, but did not appear to have progressed much further than theory in the UK by 2005.

The notion that a high level of interactivity and the online co-creation of policy is a democratising, universal good is challenged by Lilleker et al (2010) who used, not an electoral example, but online consultation in conducted by the Liberal Democrats in relation to their 'Freedom Bill', which was designed to repeal successive acts of Parliament which the Liberal Democrats felt had undermined

civil liberties. The authors argue that to extend co-creation of *policy* to an online audience outside of the formal structures of the party would erode the democratic institutional mechanisms for policy creation within that party, and that "in terms of policy development, interaction with the wider public cannot override the importance of the formal internal policymaking processes" (ibid:111).

This perspective suggests a similar approach within the Liberal Democrat Party to that within the Obama campaign, in which communication was delegated but policy was strictly controlled by the internal hierarchy (Plouffe, 2009:319). This is especially true in light of the appreciation by the Liberal Democrats of the value of 'snowballing', where online communication with activists is converted via their offline conversations with friends into a wider promotional campaign. They appear to advocate the use of 'copy me' techniques, disseminating their arguments with supporters via a "formal type of interactivity, created and led by the party"(Lilleker et al., 2010:110), with the understanding that those supporters would internalise the debate and replicate the policy ideas throughout their wider social networks. At least within the Liberal Democrats, by 2009 we can see the beginnings of the Web 2.0 mind-set when it comes to conducting a promotional campaign in the UK. However Web 2.0 is more than a mind-set, it comes complete with its own set of digital social networking tools of which Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are the most prominent. The next section will address the adoption of these technologies in the context of the election campaign.

Social networking in elections

Social Networking Applications (SNAs) are trans-modal Internet based technologies i.e. they exist both on the Web and as applications on other devices such as smart phones¹⁵. They allow users to upload and share their own content as well as content from other parts of the Internet with connected groups of friends, or in the case of more open networks such as YouTube, with anyone who connects to the application. Whilst there are a plethora of such applications available online, including Myspace, Bebo and Flickr, the most significant in terms of the focus of this study are Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, although others such as Flickr have also been utilised by political campaigns (See for example The Conservative Party, 2010b).

There is some theoretical dispute over the nature of Facebook and its democratic potential and as these relate largely to its nature as a network, wider points about SNA can be gleaned from them.

¹⁵ Social Networking Application (SNA) is an expression favoured over Social Networking Site (SNS) by Meikle and Young (2012) as it acknowledges the multiple platform compatibility of SNAs. SNA will be favoured within this research except where empirical work focuses on data obtained specifically from the Web version of an SNA when SNS may be used.

Robertson et al describe Facebook as a near perfect public sphere; as characterised by "critical rationality, equality, freedom of expression, and dissemination [of ideas]" (2010:13) - a better realisation of the concept than offered elsewhere on the Web. However others such as Joss Hands (2011) and Steffen Dalsgaard (2008) have argued that there are in fact hidden hierarchies in operation within these seemingly open networks. Hands for example, makes a distinction between social networking sites such as Facebook and a 'truly' distributed network. Facebook, he argues is a 'virtually distributed network'.

Web 2.0 applications...push the Internet towards [a] hierarchical control model...by funnelling...Web traffic into their own proprietorial domains...thus swapping the actual distribution of the [wider Internet for the]...virtual distribution...under the hierarchical element of the [Domain Name Server and thus are]...more easily turned off or controlled. (2011:85)

That is, the control of a network by one overarching, hierarchical corporate structure with the power to set the rules of social engagement within the network, or even shut it down completely, is reflected within the technical architecture of the Internet itself. Dalsgaard (2008) goes further, suggesting that the unequal relationship between users, such as on Facebook where some have many friends and others have few, renders all such networks inherently hierarchical in terms of power relations - the same model being replicated on the wider Internet by the disparity in traffic between prominent and obscure websites. A similar argument was also made by Clay Shirky (2008) although he contended that this inequality of power was distinct from structural hierarchy because of the lack of a formal, rigid chain of command.

Despite these qualifications on Facebook's egalitarian potential, the application does fulfil one aspect of the public sphere extremely well and that is the dissemination of information, a trait shared with all successful SNAs. As Miekke and Young (2012:60) point out, restrictions on the extent to which information could be shared and dispersed around the system - such as having to wait for Apple to approve photos - were amongst the principal complaints levelled at Ping, Apple's failed Social Networking Application. Memetically speaking these virtually distributed networks provide common mechanisms for memetic replication; the 'like' and 'share' buttons in Facebook (also embedded in a myriad of other websites) and hashtags in Twitter, are easy adaptations by which a meme can spread throughout a network. Such networks are designed to facilitate their replication because they are designed to enable people to easily share multimodal cultural content.

For the political candidate, utilising these mechanisms is simply an extension of the peer to peer logic articulated in the 2004 Presidential campaign, whilst the majority of the contemporary social networking sites, were not available during the UK's 2005 general election, the 2008 Presidential cycle did see them incorporated into campaign propaganda efforts. Research into political Facebook use amongst college students by Vitak et al (2011) suggests that not only does political activity on Facebook correlate positively with political activity offline, but exposure to political posts on Facebook's newsfeed increases the likelihood that those viewing it will engage in online political activity. As a tactic the peer to peer approach can be effective in increasing voter turnout both online and through offline interpersonal interactions (Ruggiero, 2011). Engagement is not limited to voting and volunteering, as Marie Spaeth (2009) points out, the public are increasingly producing campaign adverts themselves rather than remaining passive consumers of online information - as was evidenced in the 'Art for Obama' movement observed by Wert (2009). Even when content was produced by the already famous rather than previously unknown members of the public - as was the case with will.i.am's musical reproduction of Obama's 'Yes We Can' speech - these videos were not only copied with perfect digital accuracy via the 'embed', 'like', 'share' and 'Tweet' options made available through SNAs, they were also reproduced in their entirety with people recasting themselves in the roles present in the original video, with the myriad variations produced in this way were posted back to YouTube (Vernallis, 2011).

It is the volume and variety of this kind of citizen produced propaganda which makes the election campaign in the Web 2.0 era so distinct from previous ages. Like the 'virtually distributed' networks which facilitate it and the infrastructure of the Internet itself, citizen generated propaganda is pulled in opposing directions with respect to its democratic impact. It requires a mass, active support base who both believe in a cause or candidate and can clearly articulate that support - the very essence of an engaged, participating citizenry. However, the replication of memes can include the replication of the lies, half-truths and misinformation with which even honest propaganda has become so detrimentally associated. Spaeth's observation that Obama was "a wonderful mirror on which voters could project their own hopes and visions" (2009:439) is characteristic of this problem. Put simply, memes - including memes of propaganda - replicate because they convince people to replicate them, not because their replication necessarily serves a higher public good.

Conclusion: Digital propaganda, losing control or hiding it?

As increasing numbers of citizens in developed democracies have gained access to online communication tools and the digital divide in these societies has begun to close, politicians and their

campaign staff have become increasingly interested in using these tools for campaign propaganda. What began in the US during the 1990s as simple electronic billboard, developed into a more interactive and sophisticated set of marketing tools and the lessons learned by US campaigners have spread to the UK. The realisation that the 'pull' rather than 'push' nature of Web as a medium and the tendency of campaign websites to be of interest mainly to those already convinced by the party in question, could be an asset rather than a detraction, made a stark difference in terms of the level of interactivity campaigns provided. During the 2004 Presidential campaign cycle in particular a change could be identified in the nature of how the Web was being used by campaigners; a previous reluctance to provide facilities for or engage in online discussions with voters for fear of losing control of a campaign's message, was replaced by a desire to use such tools to bring supporters within the fold of the campaign organisation and increase their level of active participation with the campaign. By 2008 and with the arrival of a plethora of new SNAs, these techniques had been properly embedded within a controlled and hierarchical campaign structure which sought to ensure that such activists replicated the brand messages and arguments of the candidate with accuracy, but varied the form of their communication to ensure that those messages appeared personalised and unaffected. Mobilising a new generation of citizen propagandists should now be the goal of any party propagandist seeking to use these tools effectively. However, whilst the changing nature of communication media may make this trend difficult to resist, it does require a willingness on the part of a campaign to relinquish a certain level of control over the form if not the content of a message and it holds within it the potential for backlash if the people mobilised in this way later feel they have misplaced their faith and support. It is here, if anywhere, that the democratising potential of the Internet campaign can be found.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Recent work in memetics has focused on Internet and pop-cultural memes and has taken a largely quantitative approach reflecting the discipline's scientific roots. For example Weng et al's (2012) work on the role of communications structure and attention span on memetic replication, Bauckhage et al's (2013) work on the temporality of Internet memes and Romero et al's (2011) investigation into complex contagion in digital culture, all rely on mathematical models. Limor Shifman and Mike Thelwall have both conducted memetic work using forms of categorical content analysis such as Shifman's (2012) investigation into YouTube memes and their joint 2009 paper on the memetic diffusion of an online joke. Thelwall (2009) also constructed a specific methodological approach within the field of Webometrics which he referred to as 'Web memetics' designed to study the evolution of digital information over time.

Whilst Thelwall in particular characterises his categorical approach as 'qualitative' (Thelwall, 2009), his work, as well as that of Limor Shifman, relies heavily on quantitative metrics - albeit within a subjective, categorical framework. This chapter will seek to expand on the approach pioneered by Shifman and Thelwall by designing a memetic methodology within a thematic and highly qualitative analytical structure. Although the study as a whole will include some quantitative aspects, these will be determined, structured and analysed within the qualitative framework outlined in this chapter. This is intended to overcome some of the practical issues encountered when researching historical online data, as well as to provide an appropriate set of analytical tools with which to tackle the complex subject of political propaganda. In order to provide a clear account of the methods to be used in this study it will first be necessary to lay out the precise nature of the data to be analysed, followed by a subsequent explanation of how it was gathered and the ethical considerations presented by its use. It will then be possible to elaborate further on the techniques which will be used to analyse the data. The chapter will conclude by providing a memetic 'methodological toolkit' comprised of a set of methodological techniques intended to be applied and tested throughout the case study.

Data

The total data corpus for this study was collected in two separate bodies, the first (Corpus A) was collected prior to the commencement of the project and was the basis on which the project was designed and funded, the second (Corpus B) was collected during the study itself in order to make up for losses due to data corruption throughout Corpus A.

Corpus A consists of 811 files the majority of which are stored in the webarchive format with a small number saved as PDF files, some of the Twitter information was recorded using the now defunct website *Twapper Keeper*. This corpus included website homepages and Social Networking Site (SNS) pages from a selection of UK political parties during the 2010 election. The exact number and category for each of these files is available in Appendix A with the original data available in Appendices B, C, D and E.

As previously indicated Corpus A suffered from extensive file corruption problems which began in January of 2011 and although some data was retrievable this limited its usefulness to the final project. The corruption was due to the inability for portions of the files which were running JavaScript to access online information once the original pages were updated and thus affected all copies of the files (Pollard, 2012). Of the Web pages the Labour Party files were most seriously damaged by this problem which was manifest in time out errors and blank sections of missing data where images, videos and interactive material should have been. However overall the Homepages sub-corpus was the least corrupted portion of Corpus A and considerable information was still available for analysis. The data from all of the SNS sub-corpora were more seriously damaged leaving only small amounts of information, specifically this included sequential data on the public interaction with Twitter, Facebook and YouTube over the period of the 2010 election campaign. This was collected in Excel and can be viewed in full in Appendices F, G and H which forms the bulk of the analytic corpus derived from this material (the exceptions consisted of secondary material as outlined below). The majority of Facebook and Twitter posts and YouTube videos were inaccessible. Although it was subsequently possible to gain access to some of the videos which remained online, the Twitter information was almost completely lost, although posts on individual hashtags such as <#nickcleggfault> were obtainable through the website *Pulse of the Tweepers* (2014) as well as through secondary sources such as blog postings from during the election period. Efforts to retrieve a larger corpus of data Twitter data via *Pulse of the Tweepers* were abandoned when it became clear that the information obtained in this way conflicted with contemporary accounts by those who had observed the spread of specific Internet memes in real time as this suggested that an unknown portion of such a corpus could be missing. In addition there were also issues relating to the site's positive/negative categorisation feature which ostensibly records the proportion of positive and negative comments for a given hashtag (see discussion Chapter 7).

In order to replace some of the missing data from Corpus A several options were explored, including the possibility of using either the software Webometric Analyst or Google's 'search by data' feature to track the distribution of electoral memes across the Web during the 2010 election. However these

options proved unsuccessful as it was not possible to collect such historical digital information with sufficient accuracy (Pollard, 2012).

It was possible to gather a detailed collection of Facebook posts (Corpus B) during the period June - July 2012 using Facebook's timeline feature. Corpus B includes approximately two and a half months' worth of Facebook posts in a sample spanning the period March 1st 2010 to May 11th 2010 (the date on which the coalition government was announced). This information was initially gathered for The British National Party (BNP), The Conservative Party, The Green Party, The Labour Party, The Liberal Democrat Party, Plaid Cymru and The Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP). However the decision was subsequently made to focus the analysis on the three major parties (The Conservatives, The Labour Party and The Liberal Democrats) and the data for the minor and regional parties was not subsequently categorised for more detailed scrutiny. The full complement of categorised data is indicated in the table below and includes the full text of the post, date it was posted, name of the poster, number of likes and comments it received and where applicable the type of embedded media (such as images or video) which the post contained. A more detailed description of the data in Corpus B is available in Appendix I and the full corpus in Appendix J.

	No. of Facebook Posts			
Month	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Total
March	74	29	372	475
April	304	176	3642	4122
May	484	121	1377	1982
Total	862	326	5391	6579

Figure 6: Corpus B Data

In addition to Corpuses A and B the subsequent case study relied on secondary data which was gathered from published statistics, academic literature on the election and both new and traditional news sources. This material will be cited specifically where relevant.

Procedure

The material in Corpus A was collected several months prior to the commencement of the project by the Media Discourse Group at De Montfort University during the course of the 2010 election. For the majority of the sample this consisted of one webarchive file saved each day for each of the respective categories outlined in Appendix A, however there were some deviations from this norm. The first week of data collection for the Homepages sub-corpus was collected in PDF format as the benefits of webarchive format had not yet been realised. The switch was made in order to maintain some of the interactive features of the original pages, with additional files also recorded to provide a more detailed record of some of these features as well as splash pages which were used at various

times - in particular by Labour and the Liberal Democrats - to promote specific aspects of their campaigns. The Homepages sub-corpus begins on March 10th 2010 with files recorded five days a week until May 20th. The records for the SNS sub-corpora began slightly later with Facebook and Twitter data commencing on March 17th and YouTube on March 26th. All of the social media records cease on the 20th May at the same time as the Homepages sample.

Despite the limited amount of usable data in this sub-corpus what each of the social media samples retained was accurate information on the public interaction with each site during the period of the 2010 election in the form of Twitter followers, YouTube video views and Facebook likes/fans. This was subsequently used to generate time series data. This data plots the increase in interaction with each page over the course of the election period by measuring the number of Facebook fan/likes recorded for each party. As more data was available for Twitter and YouTube it was possible to measure additional categories for these sub-corpora. Within the Twitter sample this is the number of Tweets, followers and 'followed' accounts connected with each party. Within the YouTube sample it was possible to construct time series data for the number of channel views, total upload views and subscriber numbers. The full data set which produced this material is available in Appendices C, D and E and the analytic corpus is detailed in Appendices F, G and H.

Corpus B was obtained via Facebook's Timeline feature over the period of June-July 2012. The full content of the reference and analytic corpora are available in Appendices B and J. The reference corpus consists of 21 PDF files; one for each party for each month of the sample (as already mentioned the minor and regional parties were not subsequently entered into the analytic corpus). These files were collected in order to provide a permanent record of the data in the analytic corpus which was for the most part copied directly from the Web. The advantage of this mode of data collection once again relates to the problems caused by JavaScript. The conversion of the Facebook pages to PDF files retained the full text, layout and image content of the original page but failed to include the symbols indicating the difference between a like and a comment where posts had been subsequently interacted with. It was also unable to retrieve the text of most of the comments and for this reason, as well as reasons of space, the decision was made to omit the full text of the comments from the data collected. During the last week of June 2012 the Liberal Democrat's page removed the capacity for members of the public to post comments directly to their page which had the effect of removing all previous comments of this kind, as a consequence all Liberal Democrat posts from 24th April 2010 until the end of the sample were collected from the PDF files rather than directly from the Web. This necessitated the creation of a combined like/comment column in order

to gauge public interaction with each post as it was not possible to differentiate between these forms of interaction within the PDF document.

As with the time series data from Corpus A, the material in Corpus B provided the opportunity to assess a variety of more quantitative information to complement the more qualitative approach which will be the primary focus of this study. This includes more detailed information of the rates of interaction on Facebook in terms of the number of active contributors to each party's wall and the rate at which they contributed, as well as the ratio of posts by the party's page administrators to posts by ordinary citizens. The significance of these statistics in terms of the implications for Facebook as a memetic environment is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8 and the full data set can be viewed in Appendices I and J.

After discussions with De Montfort University (DMU) legal and digital ethics specialists on 25th January 2012 it was determined that no consent or anonymisation was required for the Facebook postings in Corpus B as the posts were all from a publically available forum. The issue did not arise for Corpus A because all personal information had been lost as a consequence of the file corruption problems and the analytic corpus of SNS data contained only anonymous information on the social media interaction rate. The Homepage data was not only explicitly public domain but consisted entirely of promotional material so the questions of privacy and anonymisation were not pertinent to that sample.

Framework

Timo Maran (2003) explicitly identified memetics as a positivistic subset of mimetic research due to its historical associations with biological science. As Lindolf and Taylor note, one of the first commonly observed characteristics of the positivistic approach to communications research is the belief that "reality is singular, a priori and objective (i.e., independent of the knower)" (2002:8) something which they elsewhere describe as a "realist ontology" (ibid:9). It has been argued within this study that the application of such a perspective within memetics has led many researchers on a fruitless search for the 'really existing' meme, to the exclusion of more productive lines of enquiry. This study will go slightly further than Lindolf and Taylor's description of the post-positive addendum to this position - that whilst reality is external and independent human perceptions of it are imperfect and limited, giving rise to a multiplicity of conflicting beliefs (ibid) - and argue that within the political realm such beliefs are more significant to the understanding of individual and collective action than the abstract reality of which they are at best a distorted reflection. Thus when investigating political propaganda, it is at times useful to entertain the interpretive notion of multiple "meaningful realities" collectively produced through shared symbolic meanings (ibid:11)

even though at other times the existence of external (possibly oppositional) facts may also be relevant to an analysis.

This may appear initially to be an attempt to adopt two contradictory ontological positions, with the post positivist side supposing a really existing (if imperfectly observed) reality and the interpretivist position a multiplicity of equally valid socially constructed realities. However when viewed through memetic lenses, the compatibility of these two approaches can be seen. First the actual ontological position taken is in fact the post-positive i.e. there is a real world in which some memes were created and transmitted and others were not, although despite the unprecedented levels at which the social minutiae of our society is routinely recorded, much of the empirical reality of social interaction is imperfectly observed and swiftly lost. However the process of deriving meaning from a transmitted meme owes much to the concept of resonance introduced within Chapter 1 and to Stuart Hall's (1996) encoding and decoding model. Meaning in the specific context of replicated memes, is communicated when an idea is codified into a replicable cultural unit by Person A and produced in a form (speech, text or some other media) which can be copied. Replication is achieved when that meme is copied into the mind of Person B who then decodes the meaning.

The environments of each of these brains contain both similarities in terms of language, widely used cultural symbols and ideas - otherwise the meme would have a very difficult time being effectively transmitted at all, it would simply be a collection of mysterious symbols or phonemes. However they also contain huge potential differences given the huge variety of what Gunther Kress (2001) referred to as our 'semiotic resources', the symbolic and linguistic tools humans use to create and deconstruct meaning. The notion of resonance previously introduced in this study argued that memes will replicate more effectively in environments dominated by memes or memeplexes which corroborate the ideas expressed within it. Thus if the meme encoded by Person A claimed that the US government faked the moon landings, the meme will find more fertile ground for unproblematic replication where the mind of Person B is dominated by memes from similar conspiracy theory memetplexes. In such an instance the process of deriving meaning from replicated cultural units, whilst itself not a process of replication, would result in a resonance in terms of the interpretation of the meme between Person A and Person B who each decode and endorse the meanings encoded within such a meme in the same or similar ways. As a consequence Person B is more likely to produce a further, accurate copy of the meme; this is as opposed to Person C whose mind is dominated by patriotic or scientific memeplexes which either reject anti-government memes or demand very high standards of proof for controversial ideas. Such memes would make their mind an inhospitable place for conspiracy theory memes, as a consequence person C would decode such a

memes in relation to a very different value system and replicate it only as a means of satire or critique of the shared perspectives of Persons A and B, lessening the likelihood that the meme will remain intact and unaltered by the copying process (Blackmore, 1999).

The significance of this example in terms of the notion of multiple socially constructed realities is that an individual's reality - however divergent from 'true' reality it may appear to an observer - can be highly relevant in terms of memetic replication, potentially more so in some situations than external, contradictory facts. However when addressing propaganda, a means of communication which can undoubtedly be used to deliberately obscure such truths as can be identified within the limitations of human observation and interpretation, such facts should not be entirely ignored. The question of which approach to take within the confines of this project will depend largely on the nature of the questions being asked in order to analyse the data collected within the two primary analytic corpuses. This chapter will conclude by laying out a selection of possible tools which can be used to explore the information from a memetic perspective. These tools take the form of questions which can then guide the interpretation of the data and each of them will be used and evaluated throughout the course of the upcoming case study.

The memetic methodological toolkit

Method

The qualitative memetic methodology proposed in this section is derived from the procedure outlined by Jager and Maier (2009) whose adherence to the Foucauldian tradition within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) corresponds well to the perspective on power (as dispersed, inescapable and bound inextricably to knowledge) which was referred to briefly in the literature review. Jager and Maier's reference to "units of meaning" (2009:55) and the way discourses "take on a life of their own as they evolve" (ibid:38) makes their approach particularly relevant to a memetic analysis, although their reference to evolution appears largely metaphorical and they do not mention replication or appear to note the significance of unitary fragments of data to a theory of cultural evolution. Their recommended methodological approach involves six steps for analysing a text (Jager and Maier, 2009:55):

1. Context – addressing selection and position in relation to relevant people and ideas
2. Surface of the text – structure and layout
3. Rhetorical means
4. Content and ideological statements
5. Other peculiarities of the text

6. Discourse position and overall message

Whilst some of these steps have a relevance to a memetic analysis, the focus of a memetic methodology is always on replication and opportunity for replication. The memetic methodological toolkit outlined below has thus been adapted to incorporate these factors as well as the navigation of the ontological issues discussed in the previous section. As it will be necessary to test the utility of each 'tool', this list will be followed by a brief discussion of the rationale behind it and how it will be applied to the material within the analytic corpora.

1. Identify the level of replication – is this a meme which is likely to replicate as a whole or a memplex which contains and protects replicators that could spread independently? Could it do both?
2. When analysing a memplex, consider whether it could be classed as a vehicle.
3. Disaggregate the memplex into its constituent alleles. Does the alteration of an allele change the meaning of the meme?
4. Is this a 'copy the product', or 'copy the instructions' meme?
5. Take the meme's eye view. What opportunities for replication exist within this environment?
6. Identify the propaganda techniques used to facilitate memetic replication within the data corpus. Have they been replicated from elsewhere?

Level of replication

There are three basic questions which need to be asked in order to determine the level of replication.

1. Can this potential meme replicate as a coherent whole?
2. Is there any evidence that it has?
3. Why/why not?

This characteristic, the capacity to be accurately replicated as a coherent whole, is the only criteria a piece of data needs to meet in order to enjoy the status of academic meme as defined by scholars such as Dawkins (2006b), Blackmore (1999) and Dennett (1996, 2003). Some scholars, including Dawkins (see additional notes in Dawkins, 2006b 20th Anniversary Edition) as well as (Aunger, 2000b) have placed additional conditions on *where* a meme must exist - specifically drawing a replicator/phenotype distinction between memes in the mind and their external expression as artefacts. However, such distinctions are not universally accepted within the field and do not pertain to this study's analytic corpora, which are entirely based outside of the mind. Possible reasons for

deciding that a piece of data from either corpus should not be categorised as a meme could be their size and/or complexity - are they too large or difficult to copy? The advent of digital copying techniques has arguably increased the possible size and complexity of the meme. However this study will also be dealing with data such as constantly updated Facebook pages, representing large numbers of memes with varying degrees of independence being replicated throughout a network. The decision as to whether such an environment can be most usefully thought of as a meme, a memeplex or a vehicle will determine the nature of the subsequent analytic techniques to which that data is subjected to. It may also be useful to consider the notion of the 'unit of meaning' mentioned by Jager and Maier (2009), as the relevant level of replication may be contextually derived. For example, whilst letters and phonemes in a speech may be considered memes, slogans might be the more appropriate level of replication to look at when addressing propaganda.

Is this memeplex a vehicle?

This tool will also provide the opportunity to evaluate the memetic use of the genetic conception of the vehicle introduced in Chapter 1. It has been used by scholars such as Dennett (1996) and Distin (2005) to refer to memetically constructed mechanisms for the protection and transportation of memes, but as Blackmore (1999) points out, its use has been inconsistent and it may not in fact be a constructive addition to the memetic lexicon. Distin's argument that Dennett's use of the phrase to describe a wheel may have been over literal is accepted within this study. However, this leaves at least a number of potentially useful occasions in which the term vehicle could be applied within a memetic analysis of propaganda; individual people or human minds, Blackmore's tentative suggestion of the large institutional or ideological memeplex and complex digital environments such as Web pages or Facebook walls which are included within the analytic corpora. The first example is simply the transference of the genetic concept of the vehicle onto the memetic, just as human bodies carry around and protect their genetic replicators, so their brains carry around and protect the additional cultural ones which they are so well adapted to transmitting. The latter two examples are by contrast, entirely memetic constructs existing between human beings and thus beyond individual brains. What they have in common is a mechanism of replication which relies, not on the unitary replication of the whole, but on the incremental replication of constituent memes. A Facebook page replicates throughout the network by smaller links which are disseminated through 'shares' and 'likes'. Although the mechanism is less regulated and less easy to monitor, ideological memeplexes too can be seen to encapsulate smaller memes such as symbols and myths which replicate unitarily in a way which Catholicism for example, cannot do. Where they successfully colonise a mind and become part of what Blackmore called the 'selfplex' – a memetically constructed sense of self – they also pave the way for further memes from that ideological

memplex which will resonate with the initial symbols and myths. This distinction between unitary and incremental replication is important, but not entirely consistent with the genetic concept of the vehicle which relies specifically on the phenotype/replicator distinction which can still be seen to a certain extent in the 'human brain' example. Whether the vehicle category is likely to be applicable to memetic thought is therefore a matter of contention to be addressed within the forthcoming case study.

'Copy the Product'/'Copy the Instructions'?

This division was originally suggested by Blackmore (1999) as a more applicable distinction between memes than the genetic distinction between the gene as the replicator and the phenotypic characteristics they help to produce. Blackmore argued that the 'copy the product' meme replicates less accurately because, whilst it may be copied, it does not contain within it any instructions for replication. Conversely 'copy the instructions' memes include instructions for the accurate replication of a product. Dawkins, in his introduction to *The Meme Machine* (Blackmore, 1999), goes further, arguing that because human beings are especially good at recognising patterns, some memes can carry implicit instructions for their own replication – something which is comparable to Distin's (2005) notion of the schematic meme. This is arguably how image macros which allow multiple variations of an Internet meme to be produced work; implicit instructions are decoded by the human reader then encoded explicitly in order that they may be reproduced accurately using a computer algorithm. This provides a framework which allows for variation from the original whilst maintaining a set of recognisable characteristics throughout each of the meme's subsequent iterations. However it is easier to judge what Dawkins called the "self-normalising" (see his introduction to Blackmore, 1999:xii) power of the 'copy the instructions' meme within digital culture by looking at memes prior to the creation of image macros. Whilst the presence of such a macro proves that the essential characteristics of a pop-cultural meme can be broken down into a set of implicit instructions, those instructions have to be evident within the meme in order for someone to write the algorithm on which the macro is based. Internet memes which have not inspired this process can still have sufficient implicit instructions for this process to continue without the use of an algorithm to maintain the integrity of the instructions - which will have to be decoded from a previous iteration of the meme by each individual rather than reproduced accurately by a computer. The distinction between these two categories of meme is not universally shared by memeticists, Distin (2005) for example does not consider 'copy the product' memes as replicable at all, at least not without the addition of prior knowledge on behalf of the replicator. Analysing the data for memes containing implicit and explicit instructions for their own replication or the replication of

other memes can thus be seen not only as a potentially useful tool for the analysis of a meme's replicator power, but also a test of the utility of Blackmore's memetic categories.

Disaggregate the memeplex

This is likely to be especially useful for the kind of 'copy the instructions' memes which lend themselves to image macros. The substitution of constituent memes which make up specific aspects of the whole can radically change the nature of a meme's meaning and the kind of environments in which it will successfully replicate. This was demonstrated in Chapter 2 in the context of the Labour Party's anti-benefit fraud posters. The process of disaggregation is likely to be similar to the process of analysing the overall level of replication, questioning whether specific constituent aspects of an already established meme (such as a poster or slogan) can replicate independently and whether or not there is any evidence that they have done so. For larger portions of data such as the Homepages or Facebook walls, this process will be integrally bound to the meme's eye view and associated analysis of the memetic environment. The purpose will be to identify the smaller constituent memes which could replicate as 'emissaries' for the page as a whole - something also discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to the memetic theory of propaganda. An emissary meme was suggested as a mechanism whereby large ideological or institutional memeplexes could grow and expand, not by the accurate replication of the whole, but by the effective proliferation of multiple smaller memes containing instructions pertaining to the larger memeplex. Dawkins (2006c) argued that the epidemic spread of religious memes can be attributed to the incorporation of 'copy me' instructions within aspects of religious doctrine. However effective emissary memes could also include those which encourage those who view them to expose themselves to additional similar memes. If such replication was successful it would make the mind of such a person increasingly hospitable for additional memes produced by the memeplex for which the initial meme was an emissary.

Meme's eye view

The meme's eye view is a technique based on Dawkins' 'gene's eye view', the notion that you can understand the behaviour of a mindless replicator by endowing it with metaphorical agency and assessing the world from its perspective. As previously discussed, the thing which any replicator metaphorically seeks is the opportunity to make copies of itself, that is its principle defining characteristic. In a move which Dawkins (2006b) later came to regret¹⁶ he named this characteristic 'selfishness', a move which led to considerable confusion, including the erroneous belief that he considered human beings to be inherently selfish and that selfishness was a natural and morally desirable state of affairs within human society. Dawkins (2006a) later observed that others had

¹⁶See introduction to the 30th Anniversary edition of *The Selfish Gene*.

failed to note the use of the metaphor, suggesting that he was attempting to endow genes with 'real' rather than metaphorical agency. Arguably this can be seen as a consequence of his reflexive use of the terminology associated with the 'gene's eye view' model, such as the term selfish, which he repeats throughout *The Selfish Gene* with only occasional reminders that such agency is purely metaphorical. The term selfish is also, as he later acknowledged (Dawkins, 2006b), heavily loaded in a way he claimed not to anticipate and caused considerable confusion especially in relation to human agency. The later trend for some memeticists, most notably Blackmore (2003, 1999), to abandon the notion of individual free will altogether, suggests that such conclusions were not limited to those seeking to critique his work.

In light of this history, the use of the 'meme's eye view' perspective within this study serves two analytical purposes and one theoretical purpose. The analytical purposes will include the appreciation of how the meme operates within its environment in terms of the exploitation of available opportunities for replication. It will also include a more detailed analysis of the replicator environment, following the argument suggested in Chapter 2 (in the specific context of propaganda) that these two dichotomous concepts need to be given equal consideration within an evolutionary analysis. The culmination of this latter analytic function may lead to the construction of an additional methodological tool in order to address specifically environmental issues within memetic analysis. The theoretical consideration will focus specifically on the issues encountered by Dawkins when introducing this methodological approach within biology; can the method be implemented in a way which avoids the kind of confusions Dawkins encountered?

What propaganda techniques are in evidence?

A significant aspect of the memetic approach to propaganda is the idea that there are specific techniques which can be applied to memes in order to increase their replicator power and that those techniques themselves can be codified and replicated as memes. This is the theoretical basis behind the conception of propaganda as an evolving phenomenon. Whilst the techniques themselves may change with their environmental context as a consequence of this process, what remains is the notion of design for effective propagation. As Dennett points out this can be achieved by both "unconscious and methodical selection [which] are...special cases of the more inclusive process, natural selection" (2003: How we captured reasons and made them our own). The Propaganda Model, which relies on market filters to select news stories within the acceptable bounds of an elite consensus, is an example of unconscious design for replication. By contrast a highly coordinated election campaign, including recognisable campaign strategies learned from previous campaigns would produce a form of propaganda designed through methodical selection.

Identifying the replicated techniques and strategies which produce each form of propaganda is a vital part of the memetic approach to propaganda analysis. Within this study a discussion of how propaganda techniques have been replicated (or rejected) can be used to evaluate electoral propaganda campaigns from both in and outside of the party system.

Conclusion: Testing the toolkit

The construction of a memetic methodological approach which provides a toolkit with which to analyse propaganda is one of the three primary research goals for this project. Each of these tools will thus be applied throughout the course of the 2010 election case study and their utility within a memetic analysis will be evaluated alongside the results of the analysis. In order to demonstrate that utility, the application of these methods will have to provide a useful and novel analysis of the material in the corpora outlined within this chapter. Each tool needs to provide both insight into the election campaign and also effectively deploy the theoretical concepts outlined in the initial chapters of this work. As such this methodological approach can also be seen as a mechanism for testing the utility of the concepts embedded in it, such as the memetic vehicle, the 'copy the product' and 'copy the instructions' memes and the notion of conducting an analysis from the perspective of a mindless replicator.

Chapter Five: The 2010 UK General Election

Chapter 3 described the 2008 US Presidential election as the archetypal example of an 'Internet election', the UK general election of 2010 was very different. Although the Internet was widely used throughout both the long (January onwards) and short (April-May) campaigns by all three major parties (and the majority of minor and regional ones)¹⁷, it was not the decisive organisational and fundraising tool it had proved in the USA. As Wring and Ward observe, it was more a case of Internet becoming increasingly "routinised into campaigns and intertwined with mainstream media" (2010a:231). This does not mean however, that the study of the 2010 election cannot tell us a great deal about propaganda's evolution on the Internet in the context of the election campaign, and how specific propaganda techniques have worked when replicated within the UK's political system.

The upcoming chapters of this case study will explore the memetics of propaganda within national party homepages and Social Networking Sites (SNS), as well as a more general examination of the election's Internet memes. In order to undertake this more detailed study it will be first necessary to provide a broad overview of the campaign itself. In memetic terms the political and economic circumstances of the campaign and even the notable media events within it - in particular the leaders' debates - form the environment in which memes and techniques of party political propaganda can replicate (or fail to replicate), evolve and even be subverted and satirised. In the context of media events, this environment also includes other cultural replicators such as news stories, which can be considered memes in their own right as well as memeplexes on which a party meme might (metaphorically) 'hitch a ride' in order to increase its replicator power. As this chapter is focused on providing background information relating to the election, it is not intended to address the evaluation of the memetic methodology detailed in chapter 4, but will still utilise some of the memetic concepts detailed in the theoretical chapters of this study.

This chapter will begin by exploring the context of scandal and crisis in which the election took place. This is embodied first in the economic collapse which began in the US housing market in 2007 and has since spread across the globe, and secondly in the MPs expenses scandal which received considerable media attention in 2009 (Rawnsley, 2010, Jones, 2010, Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010, IMF, 2011, Pattie and Johnston, 2012). It is not the intention of this study to present a linear causal

¹⁷ See Appendix J

argument in which these crises directly impacted on the kind of propaganda used and the success parties had in using it. Rather it is to present these events as key aspects of a body politic dominated by cynicism and anti-politics; a generalised political malaise which arguably alters the nature of the environment in which memes of election propaganda were replicating. They also provide a context in which to discuss party financing; this is relevant both in terms of the relative resources afforded to each party's digital campaign, the role of digital campaigning in raising funds and the perception that online campaigning is a cheaper alternative to more traditional media practices (Fisher, 2010b, The Electoral Commission, 2011, Williamson et al., 2010).

A discussion of the main parties' financial positions coming into the election will lead to an examination of their political positions; the decline in Labour's popularity under Gordon Brown, the rise of the Conservatives under David Cameron and the mixed experience of the Liberal Democrats, whose campaign relied heavily on digital media (Rawnsley, 2010, Quinn and Clements, 2011, Fielding, 2010, Cutts et al., 2010, Green, 2010). The reason for this mixed experience lies in the 'wild card' of the 2010 election - the leaders' debates - which may have been touted as 'TV debates' but were in fact experienced by the public in the context of a convergent, multimedia environment – something which will be explored more fully in the chapters addressing SNS data (Allen et al., 2011, Wring and Ward, 2010b). Finally the online campaigns themselves will be analysed, looking in particular for evidence that the UK parties have consciously sought to imitate campaign techniques piloted in the US, as this would suggest the replication of propaganda techniques indicated by the memetic theory of propaganda outlined in Chapter 2.

An environment of crisis and scandal

The financial crisis

The ideological and theoretical relationship between memetic theory and global capitalism was touched on briefly in the literature review. Particularly in light of the influence of Dawkins' work on the likes of Enron's Jeff Skilling (Gibney, 2005:21m12s) and other proponents of capitalism as an ideology (see James, 2008:191-2) and the scepticism about that ideology expressed by Dawkins and other memeticists (Dawkins, 2006b, Vos and Kelleher, 2001, Frank, 1999), a memetic analysis of the financial crisis would likely be a lively subject for further research. However for the purposes of this study the significant point is that the crisis, which hit the UK with the failure of the bank Northern Rock in 2007 (Roddie, 2011), was a continuing backdrop against which the 2010 election took place.

Gordon Brown took up the position of Prime Minister in 2007 after ten years as Chancellor of the Exchequer, shortly before the 2008 US housing market collapse triggered a global recession, the effects of which are still being felt today (The Economist, 2013). Andrew Rawnsley describes Brown as "procrastinating" over his handling of the run on Northern Rock, although he likened the ensuing economic collapse to "Murder on the Orient Express, they [the politicians, bankers, economists and regulators] all did it" (ibid:481). Rawnsley's (2010) principal criticism of Brown relates not to his actions as Prime Minister, but to his decision as Chancellor to set up a tri-partite system of banking regulation, split between the Treasury, the Bank of England and the newly established Financial Services Authority (FSA). According to Rawnsley, this resulted in a bureaucracy unable to cope with the crisis. Although the International Monetary Fund (IMF) noted in 2011 that the principal driver of public debt in the UK had been the "revenue loss associated with output losses from the financial crisis" (IMF, 2011:3), suggesting that the role of public debt in the crisis was subsequently exaggerated, this does not necessarily exonerate Gordon Brown entirely. The size of those 'output losses' had a direct inverse relationship to the massive expansion of the financial sector under New Labour during his period as Chancellor - a factor also noted in Rawnsley's (2010) analysis. Whatever his culpability in the past however, the initial public response to Brown's intervention following the Northern Rock crisis was generally favourable, at least in comparison to the Conservatives (Rawnsley, 2010:495, Fielding, 2010), although attacking Brown for financial incompetence still proved a popular tactic during the televised leaders' debates (Coleman, 2010, Sky Staff Director, 2010).

It is notable that despite the political crisis of the MPs expenses scandal, and the much publicised 'public' debt crisis, by the time of the election the public still appeared more sceptical about the markets than they did about government. Stephen Fielding notes that those asked preferred greater government intervention in the economy to a greater reliance on markets by a margin of 71 to 22 (2010:664-5). The Conservatives, who sought to capitalise on the crisis by blaming reckless government spending under Labour, were therefore in a less comfortable position than they might have been when campaigning against a sitting government in a time of economic chaos. In fact by April 2010 as the election was called, the Conservatives had narrowly lost the poll lead which had developed in the wake of the 2008/9 escalation of the global economic downturn and Labour was once again ahead in the public mind on the issue of economic competence. Figures from the BES Continuous Monitoring Survey, cited by Jane Green (2010) suggest that whilst the Conservatives were consistently rated as the most economically competent party from May 2009 - April 2010 (by between 34.0 and 36.7% of those surveyed), by the end of the sample they had retreated to only

34.7%. By contrast Labour's ratings from the same poll went from an initial low of 24.4% to a high of 35.9% as the parties entered the period of the short campaign.

Whilst both Labour and the Conservatives had lauded the financial sector during the bubble (Rawnsley, 2010), the Liberal Democrats could enter the election with Vince Cable (then their Shadow Chancellor) who was "widely credited with predicting the credit crunch and its impact on the British economy" (Cutts et al., 2010:689). In his chapter *Liberal Economics and Social Justice* in *The Orange Book* Cable does indeed note that regulators appear "blind to the dangers presented by unrestrained debt promotion" (2004:146) although at this early stage he appears (in a limited and nuanced way) to consider the UK's regulatory system excessive. For example in the context of the financial services sector he argues that "the cost of...complex regulation...[is that] the industry can no longer profitably market...low cost products for low-income consumers" (ibid:145). This notion does not obviously fit with Rawnsley's (2010:484) observation that during the New Labour era, regulation of the financial sector became increasingly hands off at the behest of government. However both concur that such regulation as there was, became more about 'box ticking' than serious scrutiny, and that this contributed to regulators missing signs indicating the approach of an economic crisis. This prescience on Cable's part contributed to his own profile on entering the election period, at which point he was actually somewhat better known than the Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg (Quinn and Clements, 2011). The latter rose to greater prominence in the public mind, only in the wake of the first leaders' debate in which he sought to promote himself and the Liberal Democrats as a realistic alternatives to the "two old parties" (2010). Here Clegg was capitalising on the dissatisfaction with politics many felt in the wake of the expenses scandal was a frequent tactic by the Liberal Democrats and one well attuned to the environment of dissatisfaction in which the election took place.

The expenses' scandal

In 2009 *The Daily Telegraph* brought to the public's attention a story which seemed to encapsulate neatly perceptions of hypocrisy within the political class. At a time when the financial crisis had squeezed incomes for many, MPs from all parties were using loopholes within rules governing their expenses to claim, often excessive sums from the tax payer - in some cases even committing fraud (Pattie and Johnston, 2012). In terms of the electoral impact and its relevance to online propaganda, there were several dimensions in which the scandal could be seen as significant. The most obvious was the way politicians attempted to use public dissatisfaction with politics to their rhetorical advantage. In addition there was the potential impact on supporter and activist enthusiasm – a

significant factor in what Norris (2004) called the post-modern campaign as this is characterised by a rise in grassroots participation. There was also the possibility for a more direct impact on voting choices and turnout.

Charles Pattie and Ron Johnston's analysis of the impact of the scandal suggests a "surprisingly slight" (2012:748) impact on voting behaviour. They attribute this to a mixture of generalised anti-government feeling, the resignation pre-election of the most egregious offenders and the greater significance of other issues, including the deepening financial crisis, for the electorate in 2010. However this slight impact was not a universal disenchantment from politics felt evenly across all parties. Their comparative study suggests that the Labour Party, which was already suffering in the polls from an unpopular leader and a perception of ineffectiveness, suffered more from the crisis than the Conservatives. In seats where an MP had been publically identified in the press in connection with the scandal, Labour saw its votes drop by 1.25 points compared to 1.0 for the Tories. Even when party affiliation was controlled for, although the disparity was somewhat reduced, the distinction still appears to hold. In particular Labour candidates appear to have been vulnerable to claims relating to second homes when compared with Conservatives in similar situations. The authors speculate that this may be to do with the relative wealth of the party's supporters, with a greater level of disparity between MPs income and that of their constituents leading to a greater perception of hypocrisy. This argument is bolstered somewhat by the observation that indirect income indicators such as class and education suggested greater levels of anger from those employed in manual work and without degrees. However Pattie and Johnston (2012) do also point out that such demographics are on average less likely to vote. David Denver's (2010) analysis of the outcome does suggest that the Liberal Democrats also attracted some of the disaffected Labour vote. However Pattie and Johnston's (2012) research on the expenses scandal did not provide sufficient data on the Liberal Democrats to include them in the sample, so the question of whether they too benefited from the generalised, post-crisis, anti-government feeling they identify remains unanswered. Although they repeatedly attempted to capitalise on the crisis through consistent references to Conservative sleaze and Labour hypocrisy throughout the election campaign (Libdem, 2010a, Coleman, 2010).

What Pattie and Johnson's analysis indicates is a high level of anger towards implicated MPs even a year after the scandal took place, they argue that "the scandal seems...to have confirmed the public's already poor opinion of politicians" (2012:748). The authors conclude that this means politicians were not suffering a reduction in public support as a consequence of the scandal,

however in terms of those attempting to mount an online campaign, such perceptions are significant. Tepid enthusiasm for the political process is not an environment broadly conducive to the translation of online support into offline activism. Williamson et al (2010) reported that interviews with campaign insiders conducted prior to the election suggested that all of them to a greater or lesser extent expected to use online tools for this purpose. The indirect impact of this political malaise on the ability of parties to utilise digital media as a tool for recruiting active supporters would be exceedingly difficult to accurately quantify. The methods Pattie and Johnston (2012) used for example, involved comparisons between the 2010 and 2005 elections whilst the fine tuning of online campaign techniques in the use US (which the UK traditionally follows in such matters as discussed in Chapter 3) was not truly complete until 2008. The social media technology which facilitates online recruitment was also not widely available during the 2005 UK election¹⁸ (Abram, 2006, Twitter, 2014, Youtube, 2014), even before contextual factors such as significant issues, economic stability and government popularity are considered. However it is a logical supposition that such feelings within the electorate should make it more difficult to utilise campaign techniques which rely, above all, on an enthusiastic and engaged grassroots support base.

The parties

On entering the period of the short campaign – which is the primary focus of this case study - the three main political parties were not on an even footing either in terms of their financial reserves or their political capital. This section will provide a brief outline of the situation in which each party found itself going into the campaign including their public perception, income and engagement with digital campaign techniques.

The Conservatives

Jane Green observed of David Cameron that the 2010 election was essentially "his election to lose" (2010:683). She notes that the party leader was more popular than his three predecessors; William Hague, Ian Duncan-Smith and Michael Howard and under his leadership the Conservatives had recovered sufficiently in the opinion polls to provide a significant opposition to Labour. Circumstances favoured an outright victory with the continued economic downturn, an unpopular Labour leader and on the Conservative side, considerably more finance available with which to fight the election.

¹⁸ Facebook did not become available to non-students until 2006, YouTube first went live in February 2005 and Twitter was not founded until 2006.

Green's analysis draws on polling data from IPSOS-Mori in which public satisfaction/dissatisfaction with party leaders was rated on a positive-negative scale indicating the percentage of those polled who considered themselves satisfied or dissatisfied with the performance of a party leader. Previous Conservative party leaders had seen their satisfaction scores sink into the -30 to -40% bracket (i.e. 30-40% of respondents were dissatisfied) at a time when Labour were enjoying widespread support, and although Cameron came into the election with a score well below the height of his popularity when it had topped +20%, it was still between 0 and +10%, far above Brown's score of -24% (although this had risen from a disastrous low of -51% in 2008). As far as the party was concerned it also enjoyed a slight lead over Labour in terms of its perceived stance on 'the issue most important to voters', although this was by less than a percentage point (ibid:679-680, 687). Similarly the Conservatives did not show any notable popularity in their thermometer ratings¹⁹. Whilst all three parties received lukewarm appreciation, Labour were in this instance beaten in to third place by the Liberal Democrats with the scores at 4.9(Con), 4.7(LD) and 4.6(Lab) (ibid:677). What Cameron was contending with was the "decontamination of the Conservative brand" (ibid, 2010:668), his qualified success in this regard was achieved by repositioning his campaign in the centre and focusing on the traditionally 'left' issues of the NHS and the environment; although as Green (2010) points out the net result of this 'success' was more grudging acceptance than actual popularity.

The figures above provide some support for the theory that rather than the Conservatives winning the election, Labour had lost it, with both voters and financial backers withdrawing support for the Party. Indeed Justin Fisher argues that the "2010 election was characterised by [Conservative] party financial domination" (2010b:799). In particular the number of large sums donated by individuals swung decisively towards the Tories in a manner comparable to the pre-Blair years, prior to the advent of New Labour. Lord Ashcroft, who would later come under fire for his non-domicile status, provided over £3million in support via his company Bearwood Corporate Services Ltd (ibid:790). In fact the main source of Conservative income was individual donations, which are reported to the Electoral Commission only if they exceed £7,500. In the electoral period they totalled £5,220,999 with an additional £1,727,500 from companies (The Electoral Commission, 2011). This does not include the considerable wealth the party amassed in the run up to the election, with total donations between the 2005 and 2010 election periods exceeded the £18.9million spending limit, making them the only party able to reach the maximum within the campaign (The Electoral Commission, 2011, Fisher, 2010b).

¹⁹Thermometer ratings measure the public perception of UK political parties. They are compiled by IPSOS-Mori who ask respondents to rank their approval on a party along a 0 (low) - 10 (high) scale.

As a consequence of their larger budget the Conservative online operation had the advantage of a dedicated digital campaign staff of seven, as well as a private design firm to co-ordinate their brand aesthetic (Williamson et al., 2010:8). However, possibly also because of their budget, their online campaign was not as significant to their overall efforts in the election as it was for the other parties. In some ways their approach could be seen as less sophisticated in terms of the techniques and attitudes replicated from the US. Despite their deployment of online advertising and search optimisation, Williamson et al's study - based on interviews prior to the election with insiders from all three major parties - concludes that, whilst all three remained largely in "broadcast mode" (ibid:13) on the Web, the Conservative campaign was the most top-down and least interactive. Prior to the election at least, the number of individual Tory MPs on Facebook was also fewer than the other parties, possibly reflecting a similar pattern of top-down communication within the party itself, or simply the older demographic traditionally associated with their support base (Bale, 2011). The Conservative blogosphere acted as a form of permanent campaign and the relationship between this periphery and the central campaign was less one-way, with bloggers tending to see themselves as conduits through which ordinary people can communicate with the powerful rather than a means for the party to reach supporters. Possibly this explains why such sites are reputedly "less well received" (ibid:12) by those elites than the official Conservative blog.

The Labour Party

In stark contrast to the Conservatives, the Labour Party entered the election beset by internal strife, public scepticism and financial difficulty. Gordon Brown had finally achieved his ambition to take Tony Blair's place as Prime Minister in the summer of 2007 and enjoyed a brief initial period of popularity during which time his government considered announcing snap election (Rawnsley, 2010). Whilst not strictly required, this would have given credibility to his leadership as his appointment had taken place without either an internal ballot within the party, or the symbolic mandate of a general election. However it was not to be, initial speculation both in the press and internally escalated around the 2007 party conference season. Internal polling was commissioned suggesting that a general election that autumn would see Labour return to power but with a reduced majority. Brown was initially sceptical of an autumn election, pointing out that John Major had not called one when he took over from Margaret Thatcher and that he, Brown had not had time to establish himself within the position. However, some of his advisors were convinced that the initial honeymoon period he had experienced was likely to be the easiest time for him in the press, especially given the signs of increasingly troubled economic times ahead (Rawnsley, 2010, Fielding, 2010, Fisher, 2010b). Rawnsley's description of these events cites an unnamed Labour minister as

saying "[the 2007 election] started as a tease, then Gordon let it all get out of hand" (2010:498). The speculation, fuelled not just by ministers and press officers, but even by Brown himself during the conference season, began as a way of disconcerting the Conservatives. However the delay in announcing the decision, one way or the other, allowed the Tories to counter with a policy on inheritance tax which proved popular amongst middle income swing voters. Cameron's polished performance during the conference, saw a dramatic increase in his party's popularity and the Labour inner circle realised they would be hard pressed to win an election under such circumstances (Rawnsley, 2010, Fielding, 2010).

In the wake of the 'non-election' of 2007 Brown saw his popularity dip to the extent that by the 2010 election, only *The Mirror* remained supportive of Labour with the left of centre *Guardian* and *Independent* breaking for the Liberal Democrats and the rest of the aligned press, both broadsheet and tabloid, supporting the Tories (Wring and Ward, 2010a:221). Irrespective of the debate hinted at by Wring and Ward (2010b), as to whether press alignment really makes a difference to voting outcome, the distribution of support in newspapers has significance from a memetic perspective. As discussed in the section on structural propaganda in Chapter 2, if a media institution is seen as an environmental selection mechanism for replicating memes, the allegiance of a newspaper can be expected to act as a form of selection pressure. Memes of propaganda promoting a specific party's policies or brand image are more likely to be either constructed or replicated within an environment shaped by party support. The support received by the Conservatives by so many of the papers increased the number of avenues whereby such memes could reach the electorate - irrespective of what the electorate chose to do with those memes once they had internalised them. The defection to the Conservatives by the Murdock press with its large circulation can also be seen as a symbolic and possibly psychological blow (Brook and Wintour, 2009), as Labour began a steady fall from grace which was to see it lose power in 2010. This unfriendly media terrain was not made easier for the party to traverse by episodes such as the Brown bullying scandal, in which rumours of Brown's confrontational and aggressive management style were given credibility by the public intervention of an anti-bullying charity²⁰ (Chadwick, 2011) and 'biggotgate' in which Brown was recorded referring to Labour supporter Gillian Duffy as a 'bigoted woman' after she questioned him on immigration (Carey and Geddes, 2010).

In terms of finance too the 2007 campaign was to have an impact in 2010. Labour spent over £1million on the non-election (Rawnsley, 2010:506) whilst during the 2010 campaign period they

²⁰ Links exposed between The National Bullying Helpline and the Conservative Party prevented some within the media from pursuing the story but not all publications followed their example.

were entirely dominated by the Conservative's financial resources. Whereas the Conservatives could rely on a steady stream of monetary and in kind donations from wealthy backers, Labour, who under Tony Blair had also benefited from similar largess, was forced back into their traditional position of relying on the trade unions for support. This resulted in £3,324,528 raised over the course of the election with an additional £1,236,867 from individual supporters (The Electoral Commission, 2011). Whilst this period in itself produced a sum around £2million short of the Conservative total, Conservative success at fundraising over the pre-election period saw Labour spending at "between 53 per cent and 63 per cent of the...maximum" (Fisher, 2010a:211) over the campaign, a maximum which the Tories had comfortably reached.

The party's financial situation had a knock on effect in terms of Labour's use of digital media in 2010. They boasted only three directly paid staff members to co-ordinate their online campaign. This included some pop-culturally memetic ideas such as the 'design a digital billboard' competition, inspired largely by their lack of money for a traditional billboard campaign (Wintour, 2010a). Their use of sophisticated real time campaign software and Experian's Mosaic²¹ data (used as a voter targeting system), could not compensate for the simple lack of staff employed to deploy these resources when compared to previous elections (Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010). The utilisation of Blue State Digital (the company behind Obama's website in 2008), who amongst other things, masterminded Tony Blair's contribution to the Labour campaign (MacMillan, 2010), was also undermined by comments in the trade press by company boss Thomas Gensemer about a lack of enthusiasm for digital campaigning from top level staff in the Labour party (Sudhaman, 2009). These sentiments were re-iterated in a press release by Gensemer in which he stated that his team in Victoria Street needed "additional support and resources (i.e. budget, staff, creative freedom)" but stressed that the piece in PR week wildly exaggerated his criticisms which were in any respect "not unique to Labour" (Gensemer, 2009). The general impression given is that, like the Conservatives, the Labour Party was unable to relinquish centralised control over its message either to professional campaign staff or to the volunteers which a digital campaign should ideally recruit.

The Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats, like Labour, were forced by their relative lack of funding to rely more than their soon-to-be partners in government on digital campaigning. However unlike Labour, the Liberal

²¹ MOSAIC is a database of information which by 2010 was sophisticated enough to classify households and even individual voters by demographic factors and consumer preferences. This data could then be combined with information from door to door canvassing and used to target swing voters in key constituencies (Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010:233)

Democrats have a reputation as early adopters of digital technology (Williamson et al., 2010, Lilleker et al., 2010). In some ways their appreciation of the crucial relationship between online communication and party activism is better developed and more sophisticated than their rivals. They also relied more on volunteers - particularly for their digital campaign - than either Labour or the Conservatives, although professionals were employed to provide training for those using their online toolkit (Williamson et al., 2010:11). They appeared to advocate a more 'bottom-up' approach than the Conservatives, including attempts at the co-creation of branding advocated by Tom Roach (2006) in his analysis of memetic marketing. For example, they claimed that user generated content was being "fed...into their policy agenda" in addition to the production of material to be "distributed virally by supporters"(Williamson et al., 2010:9). In addition to their central campaign, the election the Liberal Democrats boasted a greater number of digitally active MPs and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) prior to the election period than the other two parties, with close to 60% uptake in each of those groups (compared to under 20% for Conservative MPs and under 40% for Labour, with Conservative PPCs at approximately 35% and Labour just over 40%) (ibid:18-19).

Whilst the Liberal Democrats may have, in some respects, been quite close to the successful US approach in their online campaign philosophy, there is one dimension in which Internet campaigning differed wildly in its UK context: funding. Obama was an outside candidate up against the initially much better funded Hilary Clinton, his campaign utilised new media as a fundraising tool and amassed huge amounts of money, much of it from small donors, which was then channelled into a traditional media campaign (Plouffe, 2009, Barr, 2009, Birnbaum, 2008). The lack of a funding culture in UK politics and the smaller pool of eligible donors meant that although appeals for donations were sought across the political spectrum, the amounts raised do not appear to have had a significant impact on the resources of the main parties. Certainly the Liberal Democrats, who were the outsider party with a reputation for digital nous, reported a campaign expenditure of only £4,787,593 to the Electoral Commission. This is compared to £8,009,483 for Labour and £16,682,874 for the Conservatives²² (The Electoral Commission, 2011). This lack of success in terms of online funding may provide a powerful explanation as to why the digital campaign appears to have less of an impact in the UK despite increasing Presidentialism in the way British general elections are conducted (Scammell and Semetko, 2010, Washbourne, 2013). Even prior to Obama, Howard Dean's campaign proved that the Internet, when marshalled successfully, is a potent revenue stream with which to supplement a traditional campaign. By contrast the Liberal Democrats had to struggle to

²² Does not include 'in kind donations'.

fight a national campaign with significantly lower resources than their opponents, and as Cutts et al observed, the high profile loss of Lembit Opik in Monmouthshire provided a harsh demonstration of the idea that "there is no such thing as a Liberal Democrat safe seat" (2010:115). The relatively meagre resources at the party's disposal had to be stretched further in order to prevent losses as well as acquire additional MPs.

The party itself had gone through a somewhat turbulent period in its recent history. The popular but internally ineffective Charles Kennedy had been ousted as leader in 2007 as a consequence of revelations about his drinking - probably leaked from within the party itself (Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010). Despite this 'tragic flaw' as it was depicted in Greg Hurst's (2006) account of Kennedy's leadership, the 2005 election saw a reasonable if not a breakthrough result for the Liberal Democrats. Their opposition to the war in Iraq proved popular, especially with disillusioned Labour voters and they were bolstered by an ineffective Conservative opposition. However the party's policy of targeting the seats of key Conservative figures (known as decapitation) had failed and the Liberal Democrats returned to Parliament with a net gain of 11 seats (Quinn and Clements, 2011). Due to the broad geographical distribution of its support, the party has always suffered more than either Labour or the Conservatives from the inequalities of the First Past the Post system; thus the 2005 result accrued them a total of 62 seats, 9.5% of the total on 22% of the total vote (The Electoral Commission, 2006). The situation in 2010 was even worse, with a slight increase in percentage of the vote to 23%, actually losing them seats to the Conservatives, bringing their total down to only 57, just 8.8% of all seats (Quinn and Clements, 2011). The resignation of Kennedy was followed by Menzes 'Ming' Campbell's term as leader - notable mostly for vicious attacks by the press focusing on his age (he was in his 60s). Whilst he was internally a more effective leader in terms of the creation of policy and exertion of discipline, his unpopularity with the public was unusually pronounced for a Liberal Democrat leader and he stepped down himself after barely a year in office (Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010).

Nick Clegg's surprisingly hard fought campaign against the more left wing Chris Huhne, foreshadowed an initial period as leader which saw him somewhat outshone by the party's spokesman on financial affairs Vince Cable. Playing on his accurate predictions of the recession, Cable secured considerable media coverage (often a challenge for Liberal Democrat politicians even in the upper echelons of the party). Kavanagh and Cowley described his status in the media as "quasi-academic" which bolstered his credentials as a "Global Financial Wizard" (2010:105). Heading into the election the Liberal Democrat's poll ratings had not picked up to the levels they enjoyed under Kennedy and Nick Clegg remained marginalised - even in the campaign literature he often

shared billing with the better recognised Cable (Cutts et al., 2010). However this changed dramatically on April 15th 2010 with the airing of the first leaders' debate. The exposure which the party often found so difficult to achieve appeared to awaken both the media and the electorate to the existence of the third party. The ensuing media furore dubbed 'Cleggmania' (Washbourne, 2013) and the subsequent inability of the party to translate this upsurge in popularity and interest into votes was one of the great surprises of the campaign. However, as Cutts (2010) points out, the disappointing result for the party in the 2010 election may be largely attributable to the disproportionately raised hopes brought on by the upsurge in media interest, given initial fears that a Conservative revival would see them take substantial losses. "Six months before...[they] would have been delighted with a single point increase in their popular vote and the loss of only a handful of seats, not to mention a role in government" (ibid, 2010:121).

The leaders' debates

The TV debates were a novelty in British politics significant from the perspective of online propaganda due to, amongst other things, their role in the ultimately frustrated Liberal Democrat campaign. Brown's repetition of the phrase 'I agree with Nick' became easily the most recognisable Internet meme of the 2010 election - certainly one of the few which could be seen as propagating in the interests of a party rather than satirising it (see Chapter 7). The leaders' debates themselves were held, after considerable consultation and inter party-wrangling on ITV (April 15th), Sky (April 22nd) and the BBC (April 29th). The extensive list of some 76 rules governing how questions would be asked and answers presented, covered subjects such as the use of cut away shots showing audience reactions (Wring and Ward, 2010b, Allen et al., 2011). Various publications including those just cited have quoted the Broadcasters Audience Research Board (BARB) viewing figures as: ITV, 9.68million; Sky, 2.21million (plus 1.39million watching on BBC News 24) and BBC1, 7.43million (Wring and Ward, 2010a:218, Allen et al., 2011:183). However there is some indication that these may be a slight underestimate, as the BARB methodology includes only data from broadcast television (including 'catch-up TV'), whilst trials to collect data from online viewing began only after the debates had taken place (BARB, 2010b). The only debate which still remains on YouTube in full (there are numerous clips) is ITV's debate, distributed by their YouTube channel, this has received 401,902 views²³ bringing total viewing of the first debate to over 10million.

²³Figures collected on Jan 22nd 2013. YouTube views are in themselves problematic in terms of judging viewing figures because they count the number of IP addresses which have accessed a particular clip. This means that where multiple people have watched a clip from the same IP address - even if it was at different times - only the first viewing will register. Conversely if one person watches a clip more than once from different addresses, they will be counted twice.

Nick Clegg came out with a robust lead after the first debate with over half of respondents (51%) reporting that he had won the debate with Cameron and Brown scoring 29% and 19% respectively. Possibly this was due to his success at projecting himself as an alternative to politics as usual, or simply to his novelty as prior to this Clegg was a relatively unknown quantity. The novelty hypothesis appears strengthened by the fact that he did not achieve such dramatic results in the later debates, coming second to Cameron on a steady score of 32% whilst Cameron enjoyed the relative highs of 36% and 41%, with Brown trailing on 29% and 25%. However despite these fairly favourable scores and the subsequent furore of 'Cleggmania' that followed, he was never rated above third when people were asked who would make the best Prime Minister. Cameron's later victories coincided, somewhat counter-intuitively, with large proportions (45% and 49% in each of the respective debates) believing he was the most evasive. This suggests that either the audience polled actively prefer their politicians to be less than honest, or that opinions on the leaders were already formed prior to the debates and were influencing their answers (See Allen et al., 2011 for detailed statistical breakdown).

The debates themselves had an impact on the coverage and narrative of the campaign, shaping the election story. With a few exceptions, such as the infamous incident in which Brown was recorded referring to a voter as a bigot, other stories - in particular the attacks on Nick Clegg from the Tory press - were arguably shaped by the debates themselves. In the wake of the first debate the Conservative papers appeared to wake up to the danger of the Liberal Democrat challenge and a series of stories followed in which he was respectively challenged on his personal accounting practices (Winnett and Swaine, 2010), his policies on Europe (Hope and Swaine, 2010) and immigration (Masters, 2010). This barrage of criticism led to another of the election's few positive Internet memes, the satirical hashtag #nickcleggsfault, this involved Twitter users sarcastically attributing their increasingly ludicrous misfortunes to the Liberal Democrat leader. In an almost comical, offline example of Godwin's law²⁴, some papers criticised his *Nazi Slur on Britain* (Shipman, 2010) after the *Telegraph* (Swaine, 2010) initially reported that he had criticised British prejudice against Germany as being a consequence of a national obsession with World War II. Clegg shrugged the criticism off (Shipman, 2010), possibly aware that hyperbolic attacks on him by Conservative affiliated newspapers could increase his reputation as the proponent of a new, cleaner kind of politics.

²⁴ The notion that any online discussion will eventually result in a reference to Hitler or the Nazis at which point rational debate is said to have ceased. Godwin's Law is one of the oldest recognised Internet memes dating back to Usenet forums in the early 1990s (see Brad, 2013)

Not only did the leaders' debates dominate the news agenda, they also overshadowed a plethora of other debates held throughout the election period. Allen et al (2011:181) count 18 such debates, beginning slightly prior to the short campaign with Ask the Chancellors on Channel 4 - a contest in which again, the Liberal Democrat's Vince Cable was seen to perform well. In addition, the BBC's Daily *Politics* hosted 9 debates covering issues from the economy to health and education and secondary debates between the leaders of the regional nationalist parties took place on the BBC, ITV, Sky and UTV (Northern Ireland). Alex Salmond, leader of the Scottish National Party fought hard for his inclusion in the national debates - even taking the matter to the high court, but was overruled (The Telegraph, 2010). There was even an online debate - now largely forgotten - hosted by Facebook and YouTube in which questions were submitted by the public and then selected by popularity, with the top rated ones submitted to the leaders. The questions covered some topics such as immigration which were also discussed in the TV debate, but also touched on subjects such as the *Digital Economy Bill* and drugs policy. The Facebook portion of this debate is no longer accessible, but the YouTube videos of the responses are still online boasting a modest 997,612 video views and the channel itself having only 1,573 subscribers (Youtube.com, 2010). This maybe low compared to the millions who watched the TV debates, but remains considerably more than the 19,000 viewers BARB reported watching Prime Minister's Questions the week the election was called (BARB, 2010a). A significant fact, considering that the electorate's ability to view PMQs was touted as a potential argument against having leaders' debates in the first place (Allen et al., 2011:178).

Conclusion: Replication in an inhospitable environment

The 2010 election took place in an atmosphere dominated by an economic gloom and anti-politics which not even the novelty of the leaders' debates could fully dispel. Such an environment is not the best one in which to run a digital campaign which, at least in the US, has relied on tapping into the enthusiasm of an active and passionate support base. Nevertheless both Labour and the Liberal Democrats favoured some digital campaign techniques over the more traditional avenues such as billboard advertising due to a profound lack of funds with which to fight the election; an issue which did not affect the Conservatives. Whilst the Tories too engaged with the online world, their approach appears to have been more top-down than the other parties, with interactivity largely pushed to the unofficial fringes of the blogosphere (Williamson et al., 2010). The election result - in which no party can really be said to have 'won' - and the resultant coalition government, may be seen as surprising given the apparent advantages of wealth and popularity enjoyed by David Cameron. However, public feeling going into the election was never warm towards his party, even if

his personal popularity remained relatively high. Brown's less than charismatic 'anti-Blair' style, might have been an asset, had he called an election in 2007, but by 2010 the public appeared to have made its mind up about him before the campaign period even began. His high profile blunders, such as his comment to Mrs Duffy, only served to re-enforce his already existing unpopularity. Whilst the presidential style promoted by the leaders' debates may have fed into discourse on the Americanisation of politics, the different contexts not only of the political environment described in this chapter, but also the UK's Parliamentary system can be seen to impact on the way campaigns were conducted. If digital media have their most dramatic and significant impacts in elections dominated by charismatic personalities and individual leaders who are able to amass populist followings (as suggested by Williamson et al., 2010), only the Liberal Democrats appear to have even come close to achieving the necessary criteria, although not close enough to overturn their habitual under-representation in the Commons, notwithstanding their current role as junior partner in the coalition government.

In terms of the three key research aims of this project, this chapter's primary focus has been to elaborate on the context in which the empirical data analysed in the next three chapters must be taken. This is vital in terms of the analysis of the 2010 election, but it also has a theoretical significance. Memetically context has a very specific meaning; the political, financial and media contexts in which the election took place represent significant aspects of the meme-pool, the environment of selection pressures which influence the differential propagation of some memes and other's pronounced lack of replicator power. It is this focus on the resonance of a meme with its environmental context which makes memetic theory other than deterministic. It will thus be an important reference point for the ensuing chapters, where the memetic theoretical and methodological approaches already elaborated upon will be more vigorously tested.

Chapter Six: Party Homepages

Having a dedicated party Web presence is one of the oldest forms of digital campaigning, it dates back to the early 1990s in both the US and the UK and was the focus of much of the early scholarly interest discussed in Chapter 3 (Gibson et al., 2003). This chapter will use the theoretical concepts and methodological toolkit laid out in the earlier chapters of the study to explore the use of the homepage by the three major parties in the 2010 UK election. This analysis will begin by addressing the homepage in terms of its level of replication and questioning whether it can usefully be considered a memetic vehicle. This is in accordance with the first two methodological tools laid out in Chapter 4 and will allow for an examination of the position of the homepage and the party website within the context of the wider Web. Subsequently the analysis will move on to a more detailed examination of each of the party homepages in the analytical sub-corpus as outlined in Chapter 4. This will require the disaggregation of the homepage as a memplex as well as the use of methodological tools such as the 'copy the product'/'copy the instructions' distinction and the memes eye view. There will be a particular focus on the replication of propaganda techniques in order to assess the validity of the theoretical principal outlined in Chapter 2 – that propaganda itself evolves through the replication of techniques for propagation. The definition of imitation or copying used here will be a broad 'common sense' interpretation rather than the more complex definitions advanced within some of the more sceptical literature on memetics, as it was argued in Chapter 1 that these restrictive definitions are premature and hampering the progression of empirical work within memetics. The chapter will conclude with an appraisal of the methodological, theoretical and empirical findings suggested by the preceding analysis in accordance with this study's primary research aims.

Homepages: Meme, memplex and vehicle

Identifying the appropriate level of replication for an investigation is one of the established techniques from the methodological toolkit outlined in Chapter 4. Within this chapter, party homepages will be addressed on three levels; the homepage itself, the propaganda techniques embedded within them and the content propagated by those techniques.

The first question to ask in order to determine the level of replication at which analysis should take place, is whether or not a given piece of data can in fact be replicated as a coherent whole and thus qualify as a meme. The homepage itself is not an obvious candidate as it is poorly adapted to unitary replication. However during the data gathering phase of this study, copies of all of the party homepages were made in order to carry out this analysis. This demonstrates the potential of each

homepage for unitary replication and thus 'meme' status, at least within the academic definition of the meme. However the issues with data corruption discussed in Chapter 4 do underline the lack of internal cohesion and thus copy fidelity, possessed by these files, the homepage does not make an especially effective meme when judged by the 'fidelity, fecundity, longevity' standard used by both Blackmore (1999) and Dawkins (2006b). In addition the files themselves are a static representation of a medium which alters over time as information is replaced and updated, a fact only partially ameliorated by the large quantity of files which were nevertheless unsuccessful at capturing all of the real time variations which took place on the live pages. In short, the live pages are considerably more complex than the data obtained in the sample.

When viewed in the context of the wider Web, the party homepage as an abstraction, i.e. the idea of the homepage (or more likely the entire party website) is something which can replicate with relative ease when compared to the richness and complexity of the page or site itself. For example both Labour and the Liberal Democrats posted frequent links to their party homepage on their Facebook profile²⁵ (the Conservatives were more prolific in posting links to their YouTube channel). The fact that the meme has always been fundamentally a unit of convenience (Blackmore, 1999, Dennett, 1996), flexible to the nature of an investigation is advantageous here; for example Shifman's (2012) work views memes as evolutionary and changing in contrast to virals which proliferate without variation. By contrast Weng et al (2012) in their study of the diffusion of hashtags take the tag itself to be the meme, as their focus was on the popularity and heterogeneity of memes reproduced this way, variation was of much less significance. What this means is that, using the 'level of replication' methodological tool, it is possible to analyse the homepage as both a complex of interconnected memes, and something which proliferates on the wider web. However in order to link these two levels of replication it will be necessary to turn to another concept introduced in this study – the notion of the emissary meme.

Whilst it could be argued that there is sufficient evidence of replication to view the homepage as a meme – either in its entirety or on the level of an abstraction – the theoretical work undertaken within the literature review provides us with another option. Viewing the homepage itself as a candidate for the memetic vehicle, vehicles do not replicate themselves; instead they generate and protect memes which replicate as emissaries, drawing in resonant minds which can then internalise further memes from within the vehicle. As the homepage *can* replicate, albeit without great ease, its status as a vehicle is ambiguous. However, as was concluded in Chapter 1, there are specific and relevant differences between genetic and memetic replication. The genetic vehicle does not

²⁵ See Appendix I

replicate because it is entirely distinct from the replicator and is in a sense the literal embodiment of the phenotype (and thus the figurative embodiment of the phenotype/genotype distinction); the purpose of the term in genetic theory is to distinguish an organism's physical body from its genetic replicators. However, asserting an absolute distinction between the phenotype and meme was concluded in Chapter 1 to be premature, therefore the same strict interpretation of the term vehicle may not be appropriate. The term is used here to distinguish a mode of replication common to certain kinds of memetic structure – those which tend to naturally replicate via emissary memes rather than as a coherent whole. The existence of such structures is observable and has already been discussed in Chapters 1,2 and 4, the extension of the term vehicle to cover such structures is arguably preferable (at least in the short term) to the addition of new terminology to a field already crowded with jargon, especially as the initial purpose of the term is maintained i.e. to distinguish between unified entities with distinct mechanisms for replication. In terms of addressing the homepage as a vehicle, the methodological toolkit provides a set of possible criteria for judging a vehicle and the homepage both houses a selection of replicators (in terms of blog posts, pictures of candidates, slogans, videos from the campaign trail etc.) and protects them by policing the boundaries of the digital environment, determining which memes are allowed to replicate within that digital space. The utility of extending the vehicle term to cover marginal cases such as the homepage will be discussed in detail in Chapter 10 during the final conclusion to this study.

Before a person has sought out a party webpage, that page can be seen to exist in competition with the whole heterogeneous vista of data on the Web; not only the political information available on news sites or from rival parties, but all of the social, intellectual, pop-cultural and commercial memes which could also attract a person's attention and take up their time and cerebral energy. The first level of selection therefore takes place in the mind of the potential visitor to the party website. Within the confines of this case study, if information about a party directly from the party, triumphs over the myriad other possible Internet searches, it is likely the person has an interest in the election, and a significant possibility that they have not decided against the party in question (Norris, 2003). This increases the person's potential resonance to a site's memes, at least when compared to the distribution of memes through a 'push' technology where institutional selection pressures can be assumed to play a greater role. On this level, links to the site can be seen as emissaries (see Chapter 2) for the more complex set of memes embodied in the site itself. In keeping with the 'pull' nature of digital technology discussed in Chapter 3, in order to find the more complex memeplex that is the web page and internalise any of the composite memes which make it up, a person needs to be enticed into actively looking for it.

Although it is possible to access a party's website by entering the URL directly into a browser, the obvious forum for competition between a site's emissary memes is a search engine which provides a series of links based on a search for a specific word or phrase. The algorithmic process by which links are generated via, for example, a Google search, are not made public due to issues of commercial confidentiality (Thelwall, 2009), however, given that the result is the provision of links to a small number of relevant sites from a potential pool of millions of possible choices, a form of competition must be taking place. This selection step, in which access to information is refined before memes pass into the minds of voters represents an opportunity for propagandists (or structural mechanisms, see discussion of structural propaganda, Chapter 2) to influence the replication of information. Deibert (2009) observed that the structure of the Internet presents multiple levels at which censorship can take place, gateways at which information can be restricted. What took place in 2010 was less extreme than the outright state censorship described by Deibert, but some of the same issues still apply. Taking the search engine as the gateway through which information was to pass, two forms of selection pressure were applied by the parties in order to increase the replicator power of the emissary memes drawing people to their Web pages. These were campaign finance and website design.

The Conservatives began – and won - what the BBC described as an “ad war” (Cellan-Jones, 2010a, Cellan-Jones, 2010b) with the Labour Party in which each side began buying up sponsored links for search terms from Google. Unsurprisingly the Liberal Democrats, with their comparatively small campaign budget were unable to compete. The Conservatives bought up the search term ‘Gordon Brown’ and then appeared to outbid Labour in their efforts to buy up ‘David Cameron’. The purpose of this exercise was to divert Internet traffic to each of the parties’ respective pages, with campaign finance acting as the selection pressure on the search engines – boosting the number of results for the party which bought out the sponsored search terms. However, whilst the purchase of search terms does bring up extra links to a page it does so within a separate section which clearly labels those links as ‘Sponsored Links’, potentially triggering the ‘sales resistance’ which professional propagandists such as Edward Bernays (2006) have been aware of since the 1920s. The PR firms Tamar and Liberate Media (2010) analysed the use of these tactics by parties during the 2010 election and noted that “the keywords the major parties are bidding on do not line up consistently with their policies”. That is, rather than trying to ensure that their adverts appeared next to searches conducted by people who already sympathised with their position and with whom the memes on their site had a better chance of resonating, they tried to co-opt searches conducted by people more likely to be politically sympathetic with their rivals. In addition, the firms note in their report that

“most commonly-used, issue-based search phrases were not mentioned on the homepages of the three party sites” (ibid) thus searches for those terms were not directing traffic towards those pages.

The implication from this initial analysis is a conformation of Williamson et al's (2010) conclusion that the parties' professed enthusiasm for digital media was superficial or at least poorly translated into practice, established techniques of digital propaganda such as the search optimisation techniques advocated by Tamar and Liberate media were ineffective as replicators within the political campaigns. The 'ad war' for example, demonstrates that rather than using the Web to reach sympathisers, they were targeting those more likely to be searching for information about their rival parties. An attitude which suggests that they may have been communicating as much with each other, staking out and defending their digital territory, as they were with the electorate. This is despite considerable material discussed in Chapter 3 which suggests that the notion of drawing in sympathisers and encouraging them to become more active in a campaign had been repeatedly codified and replicated as a 'copy the instructions' meme (Trippi, 2004, Davis, 2005, Plouffe, 2009). The democratic implications of these practices are less clear cut. Whilst paying for sponsored links raises the issue of money's undue influence on politics, the subtler use of key words to influence the primary search results is more covert and thus could be seen to raise the issue of transparency.

If treated as a possible candidate for the memetic vehicle it follows that the party homepages within the homepages analytic sub-corpus outlined in Chapter 4 must be memeplexes. As a memeplex, a homepage is a structure comprised of multiple, mutually reinforcing memes. In contrast to a Facebook page which can also be viewed in a similar way, these memes are all either internally generated or internally selected by the party (the presence of 'trolls' and dissenters on Facebook is discussed in Chapter 8 as a point of comparison). Within the campaign period the memes within that page are therefore selected to pursue the goal of getting the party elected. This relative homogeneity of purpose provides an additional argument for classifying the homepage as a memetic vehicle, despite its ability (albeit a poor one) to replicate as a unit. However the institution it represents, the political party vying for election, could be seen as a less equivocal example, with the homepage an aspect of that larger vehicle, providing an avenue whereby the party may distribute flattering memes and draw in resources to help fund and perpetuate the wider distribution of campaign propaganda.

The key to this process is the attraction of supporters to the campaign. First because people represent minds in which those memes can replicate, although the effectiveness with which this happens will be a question of the form and content of the meme and the environment of the mind. It also relates to what Blackmore (1999) refers to as the 'selfplex'; the internal memeplex of self-

identity comprised of memes which have lodged in the mind through association with the notion of self. Such memes would include political opinions and ideological perspectives which act as filters for new memes poised to gain entry to the mind as an engine of replication. A mind which already contained a selection of memes that resonated with the problems and policy solutions as framed by the party homepage would be a receptive environment for the memes which make up that page. The incorporation of a party's memes into the selfplex of an individual visitor to their site is the next stage in the process of memetic marketing as described by Roach (2006), the ideas need to become part of a person's belief system, their sense of self, if that person is to put time and effort into replicating them and attempting to convince others of their validity and utility²⁶.

If the first resource which people bring to a homepage when they visit it is a mind, capable of internalising a party's memes (and possibly replicating them), the second is arguably their capacity for action. From the perspective of the institutional memeplex on whose behalf the site operates, colonising a mind with enough mutually reinforcing memes that the person will become receptive to memes of action is a victory. The simplest actions might be donating to and voting for the party in question but the real success in terms of mental colonisation is activism. A person whose mental landscape is dominated by memes from that institutional or ideological memeplex is another strong candidate for the memetic vehicle. The idea of an organism as a vehicle for replicators is something which Dawkins (2006b) talks about specifically in terms of genes. In terms of memes an individual not only protects the memes which are personally important to them by defending them against potentially contradictory memes or seeking out additional memes which resonate with them, people are also adaptive and responsive, able to make nuanced decisions whilst interacting with others as to how best ideas can be adapted, in order that they might resonate with the ideas already within the mind of the person they are communicating with. This is in contrast to a text - even one as complex and dynamic as a consistently updated homepage - which will be comparatively static in relation to a real, thinking human being, albeit easier to control.

This is the memetic explanation for the widely accepted notion discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, that party webpages exist at least in part as a means by which online interest can be converted to activism. In terms of the 2010 election it can be seen in the recruitment of members and volunteers - in particular the lowering of the barriers to entry by canvassing for volunteers outside of the party membership (The Conservative Party, 2010b, The Labour Party, 2010, The Liberal Democrats, 2010). This lowers the level of personal affiliation a visitor needs to feel for a party before they can be

²⁶There is also the potential for unfavourable replication, for a meme to clash so severely with the memes already present in a mind that they can only be passed on by association with negative memes, the result being the production of counter-propaganda (See Chapter 7).

utilised as a vehicle to spread electoral memes for it. It also removes the financial barrier of membership, which exists as a symbolic as well as monetary obstacle. For example a person may be convinced to campaign on behalf of a party they only half-heartedly support as a tactical measure to prevent the victory of a party they whole-heartily dislike.

All of the parties saw the benefits of using their homepages as recruitment tools, as discussed in Chapter 3 this use of the homepage was not a novel technique for this election. However the techniques used to encourage supporter activism and the ways in which they were deployed, as well as the other techniques which can be identified through a closer analysis of the party homepages show interesting distinctions between the campaigns which were being run by each of the three major UK parties in 2010.

Homepages in detail

All three party homepages begin with the same basic layout; a navigation bar at the top (the Liberal Democrats have two), just above an interactive banner containing a selection of images, links and videos. These can be scrolled through by using a vertical navigation bar on the side in the case of the Conservatives and Labour, or underneath in the case of the Liberal Democrats. In the latter's case the bar scrolls automatically through its content as well. The Conservative page also incorporates a horizontal bar just below, but attached to the interactive banner which contains a series of links to social networking sites and other related content (The Labour Party, 2010, The Conservative Party, 2010b, The Liberal Democrats, 2010)²⁷. As memeplexes the homepages under investigation need to be disaggregated in order to be fully analysed in accordance with the methodological approach outlined in Chapter 4. This will allow for the analysis of specific, internal memes which could theoretically have replicated independently of, or as emissaries for, the party Web page and its campaign.

Labour homepages

Of all the Parties Labour integrated the most pop-culturally memetic ideas into the fabric of their campaign. This is exemplified by the 'Word of Mouth' campaign which was featured prominently in their election branding. They also made a highly visible show of using social media links to distribute internal material, effectively combining the horizontal replication approach associated with social media and the hierarchical approach associated with a more traditional campaign. They also utilised some of the notions of memetic marketing and brand co-creation outlined by Tom Roach (2006) which will be discussed in more detail in later sections. However the way these were deployed still

²⁷ For dataset see Appendix B.

had a hierarchical element to them. Labour were also at a disadvantage, in that they were fighting a campaign which relied on a distributed network of grassroots supporters and a receptive audience for their message, in a political environment in which the electorate was for the most part, uninspired by politicians in general and Gordon Brown in particular. Whilst they may have been less than effective in the context of the British electoral system, once the homepage is disaggregated into constituent campaign memes – such as the embedded videos used to promote the ‘Word of Mouth’ campaign – there is considerable evidence within the Labour homepage sample that specific techniques of propaganda have been replicated within the Labour campaign from previous campaigns in the US.

The use of campaign propaganda techniques copied directly from the US – in particular the Obama campaign – was indicated strongly in the Labour homepage design; Blue State Digital, a company formed in part by those who worked for Obama for America (OFA) were also actively involved in Labour’s digital campaign approach (Gensemer, 2009). The most obvious manner in which this was manifest during the campaign was the use of ‘copy me’ techniques. This binds together the notion of the grassroots, activist based campaign with the proliferation of easily available digital technology by asking supporters to spread supportive memes on the party’s behalf through off and online social networks. The memes distributed in this way are also ‘copy the instructions’ memes in that they come with a combination of arguments for voting Labour and instructions for the propagation of those pro-Labour memes, to others within a person’s social network. The memetic significance of the ‘digital’ in this context is not just the horizontal replication of memes made possible by the Web and Social Networking Applications (SNAs), but also the high copy fidelity which Blackmore (1999) notes, is inherent to digital technology. In theory what this provided was the possibility for both a varied and adaptive branding approach which could still, at need, perfectly replicate the ideas and policy positions of the executive and the party hierarchy. Information on policy and message could be broadly distributed to supporters and between supporters who could then adapt those messages to the needs of those they were trying to convince. However, the replication of this technique suffered considerably from a lack of resonance with the political environment in which it now found itself, and as indicated in the literature review, any evolutionary process is always a synthesis between a replicator and the environment in which it propagates.

Design of the Labour homepage

The design of the Labour homepage did not remain static throughout the campaign; it underwent a significant change not only of content but also in terms of layout. The original format included a very extensive list of potential ways in which supporters could become involved with the campaign, this

included separate buttons for recruitment and two buttons 'Labour near me' and 'events in your area' to link supporters to local campaigns, in addition to links to an email list, subscription page, donations and volunteering which parties often provide (Norris, 2003). There were also links to pages such as 'how you can help', 'Word of Mouth' and 'fundraising', all of which were displayed as buttons with logos but no text, so visitors had to follow the link in order to be sure what they represented. The 'how you can help' link for example was represented by the party rose logo and its purpose was not obvious to the casual visitor. Even before alterations to the design of the Labour homepage which brought a greater simplicity to the site and made it easier to navigate, the Labour homepage boasted a considerable number of 'copy the instructions' memes, whose self-correcting mechanisms have been touted as a means to increase copy fidelity (see Dawkins' introduction to Blackmore, 1999), as well as active efforts at exploring the potential of digital media and crowd-sourced support as discussed in Chapter 3. Both iterations of the site also included selection of links to news and YouTube videos, accompanied by encouragements to promote these memes via Facebook and Twitter. Including basic instructions for a meme's replication is a technique to facilitate 'epidemic' replication which Dawkins (2006c) notes in relation to religious memes. There were also a selection of poster designs which could theoretically be replicated in a similar manner; however unlike the embedded videos they contained no explicit instructions for their own replication.

The later design, which went live just prior to the announcement of the election,²⁸ reduced the space taken up by the recruitment buttons by amalgamating them into simpler categories, each of which was more clearly labelled. The static 'poster' image was replaced by a scrolling selection of images each linking to a different topic within the site and sometimes including interactive widgets and embedded videos. Other features which were previously promoted via splash pages²⁹ such as the policy list and 'Give to Win' were given their own section alongside permanent links to Facebook and Flickr. The former was simply a list of policy pledges outlined within coloured arrows, the latter was more sophisticated, encouraging people to Tweet their reasons for donating to Labour and published them in a scrolling feed. The video news portions were retained but redesigned to show only two individual videos with links to additional material and encouragements to engage with the party's Facebook page deployed below. The news section was also redesigned, first spreading the section out with the main story given a headline, brief abstract and an image followed by a separate

²⁸The first incident of the new design in the sample is from March 29th 2010. This is distinct from the Conservative and Liberal Democrat sites which maintained the same design throughout the long and short campaign periods.

²⁹Splash pages are pages other than the homepage to which a visitor is automatically redirected when accessing a Web site. In the context of the material analysed in this chapter they were used primarily for promotional purposes in connection with the election campaign.

section for 'other news' which included headlines that linked to the main body of each article. This portion was redesigned multiple times as the campaign progressed later incorporating an 'inside the campaign' section, comparable to similar efforts popularised in the US by Joe Trippi (2004). This was initially launched on March 29th but gained greater prominence with later design changes which also saw alterations to its layout and prominent content. As with the Word of Mouth campaign, these developments can be seen as examples of propaganda techniques which have been copied directly from the US experience. This seems especially likely given that the Labour Party not only explicitly claimed to be imitating the US approach, but also employed Blue State Digital, a company which worked for Obama in 2008 and included former staffers for Howard Dean who had worked under Joe Trippi in 2004 (see Trippi, 2004, Plouffe, 2009).

The top-down horizontal synthesis

All replicating information can be understood memetically including that which uses traditional print and broadcast media. However the pop-cultural or Internet meme is associated primarily with information which replicates horizontally from person to person across a distributed network – each iteration potentially giving rise to subtle alterations in form and content (see for example Shifman and Thelwall, 2009). The Labour Party homepage shows signs of propaganda techniques which synthesise both the vertical model of memetic transmission, what (Williamson et al called “broadcast mode” (2010:13)) and the horizontal method of information propagation which is more adaptive to its environment but harder to control (Davis, 2005, Roach, 2006). The use of YouTube is an interesting example which problematises this apparent dichotomy; whilst it is part of a social network, and thus could theoretically give rise to two way communication and brand co-creation, even Labour, whose 'Word of Mouth' campaign rhetoric suggested they might embrace this aspect of digital campaigning, in fact did little to encourage it. The videos themselves can be seen as propaganda memes designed to facilitate the replication of ideas such as 'the Conservatives are soft on crime'. The use of these videos also comes, not only with an inbuilt link to YouTube itself, but on Labour's page, frequent suggestions to share the videos, replicating them in their entirety across the relatively horizontal networks of Facebook and Twitter. However these are very basic links and what they fail to actively encourage is co-creation and adaptation, the evolution of new memes of propaganda using the basic brand templates set out within the videos. As such it can be seen as a synthesis between the replication of information generated within the traditional hierarchy of the party via online video, and the horizontal replication associated with viral *but not necessarily evolving* Internet memes (this distinction between the viral and the evolving was used by Shifman (2012) to distinguish between 'memetic' and viral online content but is not universally held or consistent with the traditional academic definition of the meme). Labour's manifesto launch also

showed signs of this hierarchical/horizontal synthesis, as it began with a splash page featuring links to download and share the party's manifesto alongside bullet points from the document and links encouraging supporters to share it via Facebook and Twitter. In terms of the replication of propaganda techniques, this amalgamation of the hierarchical development of policy and message with the promotion of horizontal distribution was an integral part of the approach taken by Obama for America, as discussed in Chapter 3 (Plouffe, 2009).

Encouraging supporters to use Facebook and Twitter as promotional tools was one way in which Labour effectively synthesised the top-down and horizontal approach to propagating campaign material. This was about using social media as tools to distribute memes developed internally for consumption by the electorate. 'Give to Win' reversed this idea utilising the techniques which Lee and Lee (1939) described as Bandwagon and Testimonial. This involved getting memes produced by supporters in the form of Tweets telling the party why they chose to donate to the election campaign, and publishing them in a scrolling feed next to a donation button. In this instance external memes were taken in and replicated via the party homepage with the party memplex acting as a filter or selection pressure. Whilst this approach is also in keeping with the kind of propaganda produced in the US in recent years, the direct replication of older propaganda techniques such as Bandwagon and Testimonial is harder to prove, as their establishment within the institutions of public relations makes it more likely that their individual uses will occur as a result of convergent evolution instead of direct imitation. However it is this latter variation of memetic replication that underpins the 'Word of Mouth campaign' which was both the central platform on which Labour's campaign was fought, and an excellent example of the replication of a specific 'copy me' propaganda technique.

The 'Word of Mouth' campaign

Labour's 'Word of Mouth' campaign bears all the characteristic hallmarks of the US approach to digital politics. In particular the production of 'copy the instructions' memes in order to facilitate the proliferation of horizontally replicating pop-cultural memes throughout on and offline social networks. The notion of persuading supporters to pass on a message was central to Labour's 'Word of Mouth' campaign, but unlike some other aspects of their homepage, this set of campaign memes included encouragements to participate in the crafting of that message as well as its replication. Douglas Alexander, Labour's election co-ordinator was explicit that this horizontal approach was an attempt to imitate Obama's successful 2008 campaign (Wintour, 2010b). The initial launch of the campaign emphasised the importance of social networks, an emphasis which was repeated in a YouTube video embedded on Labour's homepage on the 17th of March (theuklabourparty, 2010).

This did not extend simply to online social networks, but to offline networks of friends, family and colleagues as well. Alexander encouraged supporters to explain to others “why you’re Labour and why it’s important we keep a Labour government in power” (ibid). It also encompassed other notions familiar to students of the US system such as Blunket’s drive to encourage small, individual donations via their website (ibid). Memetically such a system has the advantage of easy adaptation to the very specific audience which a supporter is faced with in the course of everyday conversation. This is the propagandistic advantage of using ‘copy the instructions’ memes, talking points can be replicated accurately, maintaining a recognisable ‘core meme’, whilst peripheral content can be altered, providing the capacity for swift adaptation. Thus messages are not only personalised, in terms of the older propaganda techniques described by Lee and Lee (1939) they automatically incorporate the Testimonial of friend, family member or colleague; a potentially more trustworthy source than a stranger paid to promote a party’s message. Given that New Labour had, during its tenure in office, become practically synonymous with spin (Franklin, 2004, Gaber, 1999, Rawnsley, 2010), such an approach can be seen as a way of bypassing potential public mistrust of messages emanating directly from Labour central office. By directing propaganda memes specifically at supporters, those memes are targeted tactically at minds which are already likely to be more hospitable to that of the electorate on aggregate, especially as polls indicated that identification with the party was generally low (Green, 2010:667).

Another aspect of the campaign which involved the kind of brand co-creation advocated by Tom Roach (2006) was the Labour poster competition. Whilst the ‘Word of Mouth’ campaign explicitly attempted to cross the boundaries between real world and digital networks, the poster campaign was more specific to the digital world. The party initially produced digital posters internally for viral distribution by supporters; later they provided a macro on their homepage with which supporters could design their own (Wintour, 2010a). Visitors to the site were encouraged to do so as part of a competition with the winning poster selected by the PR firm Saatchi and Saatchi as the party’s official campaign poster (Wintour, 2010a).

The product of this competition was a wide selection of poster designs each of which represents a memplex which can be disaggregated into constituent memes. The production of posters and other memes in which the variation of constituent alleles produced further positive memes (or memes attacking rivals), was an identifiable feature of the Obama experience when his campaign produced similar material ([Sparkes-Vian as] Vian, 2011). However, whilst Labour proudly boasted over 1,000 entrants to the competition, with a variety of runners up promoted on their site and ready to be replicated by supporters, the winner suffered a more ignominious fate. They designed a poster

depicting Cameron as the *Ashes to Ashes* character Gene Hunt, above the slogan 'Don't let him take Britain back to the 1980s'. The text allele was altered and the poster was re-captioned by Conservative supporters with 'Fire up the Quattro we're ready for change' (BBCOnline, 2010), inverting the meaning and thus creating counter-propaganda. It is interesting that whilst the co-creation aspect of the competition appeared successful, in that it produced a large selection of citizen generated propaganda memes, the top-down or editorial portion, in which professionals were brought in to select the final winner (as opposed to selection by popular vote which could easily have been incorporated into the competition) appeared to backfire due to the popularity of the character to which Cameron was being compared.

Environmental drag

Given their appreciation of the importance of horizontal replication and activist mobilisation in a campaign which focuses on the digital, Labour were arguably better engaged with the established techniques of digital propaganda than either the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats – at least as far as can be assessed from close observations of their homepage. However, to the extent that they were accurately replicating a US-style digital campaign, they were following rules designed for a completely different political system. Specifically, rules designed for an outsider candidate in a personality driven, presidential contest, as opposed to an incumbent party in a parliamentary system with a notoriously unpopular and uncharismatic leader (see Chapter 5). Looking at this environment from the meme's eye view it appears to lack the single most important resource for the replication of any meme, the opportunities for replication which are provided by receptive minds, colonised with memes which resonate with Labour policies and ideas. This is consistent with the discussion in Chapter 3 about the primary resources required for a digital campaign, i.e. a mass of organised, dedicated supporters, who receive, replicate and act upon the memes targeted at them. YouTube's inbuilt distribution metric indicates that the Word of Mouth campaign was simply not spreading very effectively. The total views of Douglas Alexander's Word of Mouth video to date (26 Feb 2013) number only 6,272 and only 1,280 from Labour's homepage itself (theuklabourparty, 2010). It took nearly two weeks for it to replicate even onto the Scottish Labour homepage. How far the messages it contained were replicated and acted upon offline cannot be assessed from the online data, but the numbers themselves are not indicative of great replicator power.

In a sense this environmental resistance to Labour's pop-culturally memetic propaganda approach can be seen as an endorsement of the claims by advocates of this campaign style such as Tom Roach (2006) and Joe Trippi (2004) that it is a more democratic form of campaigning as it requires a high level of genuine grassroots support or it will not produce results. However, in the context of a wider

electoral process in which it has failed to produce results in the face of opponents running more traditional top-down campaigns, some of the more practical claims about its effectiveness made by those same advocates may be called into question, at least within this specific memetic environment. Labour's propaganda campaign may have been in many respects a memetic one, but it was heralded neither by electoral victory (although Labour did not receive a crushing defeat either) nor an election which included what Davis called a "divine and dramatic Internet moment" (2005:241).

Conservative homepage

When looked at in detail the Conservative Party homepage bares all the hallmarks of both their financial advantages and their decontamination strategy (see Chapter 5). The decontamination strategy was not just promoted through policy but was also integrated deep within the design of the page itself. The party's wealth is manifest through professional design and also in their selection of propaganda techniques. The Conservatives did not embrace the replication of the kind of 'copy me' techniques used to facilitate the active participation of supporters in their campaign to the extent that Labour did. When disaggregated the Conservative homepage contains a number of memes which can be considered disingenuous examples of propaganda; for example, actions on the environment once in government flatly contradicted their brand identity when campaigning. There was also a marked contradiction between the rhetoric of empowerment and decentralisation and a campaigning style which showed little if any indication of devolving power to supporters.

The Conservative homepage has less in the way of clear indicators that the campaign mind-set of decentralised brand replication had been imitated from the US. However other less radical techniques popularised in previous elections were in evidence. The section linking to campaign resources for supporters even included a variation on mybarackobama.com with MyConservatives.com; the same implications of bottom up power relations and supporter ownership of the campaign are retained, although in fact the Conservative campaign did not rely as heavily on individual volunteers as their rivals. The prominent advertising of merchandising was also something popularised in the US. Although it was far from new when the Howard Dean campaign adopted the idea, Joe Trippi (2004) expressed a particular enthusiasm for it as an adjunct to an operation that prioritised its supporters and attempted to make them feel like insiders within the campaign. It is both interesting and emblematic in terms of the general approach taken by the Conservative Party in 2010 that they appeared to copy the superficial technique but not the broader mentality which increased its salience. Their homepage provided Conservative Party t-shirts, but remained highly proscriptive in terms of the nature of the campaigning they encouraged supporters

to engage in. When looked at from the meme's eye view, the Conservative campaign can thus be seen as a less hospitable environment for the replication of 'copy me' propaganda techniques than Labour, despite claims that the party was interested in imitating the online success of the Obama campaign (Williamson et al., 2010).

Vote blue go green

The policy of 'brand detoxification' (see Chapter 5) pursued by the Conservatives under Cameron's leadership was a concerted attempt to neutralise public mistrust on specific issues such as social policy, environment and the NHS where they had traditionally polled badly (Green, 2010). As a general PR policy it had been in effect for some time before the election and was well integrated into both the content and design of the party homepage. Thus the aesthetic of the website included green accents on banners and frames in addition to a Conservative blue, the overall effect being one of green grass and blue sky. The longstanding replication of green alongside issues of environmentalism gives the impression of enthusiasm for environmentalist issues as does the redesign of the Conservative logo – now a tree with spreading branches – which was prominently displayed on the homepage as well as available on some of the merchandise which the page promoted. The decision to adopt the aesthetics of environmentalism has been taken by numerous companies including heavy polluters such as BP who have sought to replicate the brand identities of the more respectable environmentalist charities such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth (Macalister and Cross, 2000).

Whilst there may be a corresponding replication of ideas in some instances where a greener branding approach has been adopted, in the case of the Conservatives in 2010 this can arguably be seen as a simple use of camouflage. The symbolic identity of the green movement can be disaggregated into a collection of memes; for example, use of the colour green or images of natural objects, animals and landscapes. These fulfil a very specific propaganda function: group identification through marker scheme symbols (see Blackmore, 1999:191). The purpose of a replicating, emblematic symbol for an ideological or institutional memplex is group identity; such aesthetic symbols help identify people, ideas and institutions with that ideological or institutional memplex. Whilst more dispersed than a formal institutional memplex, an ideological memplex such as environmentalism is also a potential candidate for a memetic vehicle. Those individuals and institutions who are colonised with environmentalist memes are more likely to respond positively to (and replicate) memes which confirm those which already form part of their self-identity (what Blackmore (1999) called the 'selfplex') (Blackmore, 1999, Roach, 2006).

Although it is not always wise to draw direct comparisons between genetic and memetic evolution, in this instance the analogy of imitative camouflage works reasonably well. As organisations realise that there are PR gains to be made if people see them as 'green' then adopting the symbols of the environmental movement is a cheaper way of accessing such gains than replication of the whole ideology with its expensive policy implications; this kind of camouflage is known as greenwashing, with aesthetic and sometimes token actions taking the place of explicit, substantial commitments (Laufer, 2003). Prior to the strategy of detoxification, the Conservative's association with anti-environmentalism, especially in the context of industrial polluters and development (Green, 2010), would have formed an obvious barrier to the replication of pro-Conservative memes in any mind which included pro-environmentalist sentiments. Memetically this form of camouflage is a way for memes which could otherwise have promoted a hostile reaction, to replicate successfully in minds dominated by memes from the environmentalist ideological memplex.

Evidence that the adoption of these aesthetics by the Conservatives was merely camouflage is provided post-election by addressing the government's record on environmental policy. Their manifesto section on *Building a Greener Economy* supports the notion of environmental conservatism by claiming that, if elected the Conservatives would set up a "Green Investment Bank" to boost investment in environmental projects, put in place a minimum "floor price" for carbon along with a Green ISA. Notably they shied away from increasing government investment in environmental projects with the stated intention of the GIB to "leverag[e] private sector capital to finance new green technology start-ups", whilst environmental taxation is envisaged as a disciplinary mechanism used to fund tax reductions elsewhere rather than providing money to reinvest in the environmental sector (The Conservative Party, 2010a:31). The Green Investment Bank was indeed set up with a budget of £3billion, although it was not operational until two years after the government came to power. To date (Feb 2013) it has announced provision of commercial loans and funding for three projects including one prior to its official opening financed by constituent bodies which later made it up, however, according to the *Independent*, it has now been denied the power to borrow money until 2015 "greatly limiting its powers" (McCarthy and Wright, 2011). The overall picture of the coalition's environmental record was assessed in a report by Jonathan Porritt on behalf of Friends of the Earth, who analysed 77 of the Government's policies with a potential green dimension and concluded that after a year in office the "bad and the positively ugly indisputably outweigh the good" (2011:51) in terms of delivery on environmental issues, attributing this to a lack of leadership by the Prime Minister and outright hostility from George Osborne.

Neil Carter's (2014) evaluation of Conservative action on climate change also pointed to both the Chancellor's hostility and the Prime Minister's apparent lack of interest, as serious obstacles to the effective implementation of policy in this area. He specifically noted Osborne's provision of "huge subsidies for offshore oil and gas exploration and...generous tax breaks to encourage the...development of shale gas [fracking]" (ibid:430). Whilst Carter considers these issues to be important and detrimental, he still judges that the coalition policy program on climate change remained "broadly intact" (ibid), however Tom Burke, a prominent expert on environmental policy and advisor to multiple Conservative cabinets on the subject, observed that "until Osborne spoke at the [2011] Conservative conference, the Coalition's quite good record on climate change had masked its poor record elsewhere" (McCarthy and Wright, 2011). This record, included the failed attempt to sell off the nation's woodland and the relaxation of planning laws protecting greenbelt land from development (ibid). The 2011 conference speech, in which Osborne infamously argued that environmental issues could not be allowed to trump the interests of business, was seen by Burke as emblematic of the direction in which the government subsequently began to lean, despite the broad consensus on the significance of climate change amongst other senior figures in the cabinet (Carter, 2014).

As noted by Burke, the general picture of environmental policy under the coalition is one of instability and confusion in which

We have a government that is simultaneously increasing the planning constraints on wind farms and loosening them on fracking. It complains loudly about a proposal to freeze energy bills for two years while simultaneously planning to sign a contract for new nuclear that would freeze wholesale electricity prices at double their current level for over thirty years. It loudly proclaims itself a friend of business and desperate for investment while managing its energy and environment policies so inconsistently as to maximise the policy uncertainty business loathes and chills investment. (Burk, 2013)

Whilst Carter was more hopeful than Burke in his assessment of coalition policy on climate change, he, Porritt and Burke all point specifically to the Conservative rather than the Liberal Democrat element in the coalition, in particular George Osborne, in order to explain their environmental shortcomings. A consensus of opinion which broadly supports the suggestion that Conservative replication of environmentalist memes during the election can be seen as greenwashing, which is a form of memetic camouflage.

Design as propaganda

The previous section discussed the incorporation of aesthetic memes into the design of a homepage as a form of deception. Camouflaging the true position of the Conservative party by replicating their memes alongside those of an environmentalist movement they did not support once in office is a manipulative use of design for propagation. However it is the idea of design for propagation which is crucial to the memetic understanding of propaganda and not the manipulation or deception involved in this instance of its deployment. The replication of Conservative party memes alongside symbols and aesthetics copied from the environmental movement would still have been propaganda - a declaration that the Conservative Party identified with the environmentalist movement and its ideals - even if, once in office they had made and implemented policy based on a genuine commitment to environmentalist principles.

The idea of design as propaganda is more fundamental to communication, and more deeply embedded in the construction of a memetic vehicle – which a homepage can potentially be treated as - than the notion of propaganda as deception. This is important because, particularly in the case of the wealthier Conservative Party, professional design to facilitate the propagation of their ideological and policy memes was in evidence throughout the whole of their website including the homepage. The institutionalisation of the techniques of propaganda within the PR industry as discussed in relation to de Jong's (1999) work on memetics and institutionalisation, is an evolutionary 'good trick' - Dennett's (1996) phrase for an adaptation which effectively facilitates replication. However the institutionalisation of propaganda and propaganda techniques is not limited to institutionalisation within the PR industry. Design for replication is institutionalised not only in the PR and marketing industry but also within the professional design of websites, at least to the extent that that design is intended to facilitate the replication of emissary memes which can attract people to that site. For example, design to increase the volume of traffic and the prominence of a site in search results. This notion of design for propagation as the fundamental core of propaganda raises additional questions in terms of what can be seen as a 'propaganda technique'. Techniques for the effective design of websites, including rules for the effective replication of emissary memes, has been codified and reproduced pedagogically in a manner similar to that of the established propaganda techniques discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 and can thus be considered part of the evolving body of mechanisms which may facilitate the effective propagation of ideas throughout the body politic.

The design of the Conservative Party homepage was slick, corporate and professional. The variety of data available, the use of scrolling video clips and interactive widgets as well as the layout which was both attractive and consistent throughout the campaign, all pointed towards effective design for the

replication of the memes within the site. This is in addition to their incorporation of policy key words in order to filter traffic towards their homepage which Tamar's Political Search Index (2010) rated higher than the other main parties. The notion that simple good design increases replicator power and increases the ease with which a party's memes can find their way into the minds of voters, may appear to dilute the specificity of the memetic definition of propaganda, as well as being potentially alarming for anyone still wedded to the notion of propaganda as inherently evil. However it is important to bear in mind that the notion of propaganda as deeply embedded within the very fabric of human communication is an integral part of memetic propaganda theory. The specificity comes through asking 'which memes are being propagated and how' as do the ethical dimensions of that propagation, something which can be seen within this chapter in the context of the Conservative use of environmentalist memes within their campaign. There is also an ethical dimension to design for replication and it is the same issue as that raised by Kevin Moloney (2006) when he argued that the real problem with propaganda was not its existence but the translation of financial inequalities into inequity of access to it. That this issue is still pertinent when discussing a digital campaign is particularly significant given the impression reflected in the literature, that digital campaigning is a cheaper alternative to more traditional campaigns, with the inference that it can potentially level the playing field between poorly financed and well financed parties (Norris, 2003).

A sliding scale of hybrid communication

The implications of the higher level of finance which the Conservative Party had at its disposal in 2010 can be felt beyond the professionalism of their website design. It was clear from the nature of the digital propaganda techniques most evident on their website that they could invest upfront in campaign techniques which the other parties could not afford. For example the Conservatives promoted party merchandising on their site, which appeared to be in direct imitation of previous US campaigns and represents the replication of an established propaganda technique. This practice is not just a tool for increasing fundraising, but a technique for propagating party marker scheme symbols and accruing the Testimonial of those who purchase items depicting the party logo and its slogans. The merchandising available via the site featured the Conservative logo designed as part of Cameron's detoxification strategy and a number of other designs including two pictured on the homepage with the slogans 'People Power' and 'Big Government = Big Problems'. The use of merchandising as a propaganda technique was not a priority for either of the other parties, Labour marginalised the promotion of merchandising to a single link in their navigation bar whilst the Liberal Democrats never appeared to invest in it at all - although it became available through third party websites during the campaign as will be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

In addition, whilst there was plenty of evidence that supporters were being mobilised through the website, the Conservatives were positioned further towards the hierarchical end of the hybrid communication scale. This was demonstrated in the manner in which those techniques were deployed, for example, the immediate suggestion for ways to help the campaign include donations to a specific campaign in Barking - in addition to a separate donations button for the central party - and telecanvassing in Pendle. There is nothing to suggest independent action or the facilitation of citizen generated propaganda beyond this fairly basic level. This suggests that the party was conducting more of a Modern campaign than a Postmodern one (to use Norris (2004) terminology) and did not feel it needed to fully utilise the potentially uncontrollable resources of an active supporter network, an observation which is consistent with Williamson et al's (2010) observations of their attitude during the long campaign which they characterised as largely top-down.

Liberal Democrat homepages

In terms of environment the Liberal Democrats had a much better opportunity than Labour to capitalise on the lessons learned in digital campaigning by successful US presidential candidates. Their leader went from relatively unknown to popular during the course of the election (Cutts et al., 2010), their lack of Whitehall experience was a potential bonus in a political environment defined by 'scandal fatigue' (see Chapter 5) and they had a reputation even prior to the election as early adopters of the new technologies which had proved so useful to those US campaigners which all parties claimed to be emulating (Lilleker et al., 2010). Their homepage however shows a surprising lack of enthusiasm for the horizontal 'word of mouth' message model which was adopted by Labour. They do repeatedly emphasise their equivalent mantra 'Be Part of It' but basic social networking features such as suggestions to share material on Facebook were rarely in evidence. The Liberal Democrat Party was unique in this election in that it inspired well recognised, positive pop-cultural memes such as #nickcleggsfault and 'I agree with Nick' but these were underutilised within the homepage, although they were referenced elsewhere in the party site.

Whilst many of the techniques popularised in the US, such as the provision of an internal party social network facility, were in evidence on the Liberal Democrat homepage, as with the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrat page was as notable for the techniques which had not replicated as for those which had. When compared to the emphasis placed by the other parties, either on professional presentation and information, as with the Conservatives, or Labour's horizontal message replication, the Liberal Democrats focus was on more established digital campaign practices such as soliciting donations and adding names to their email lists. Overall their homepage contained less information and correspondingly fewer propaganda techniques, with those that were in evidence generally

replicated more prominently on the Labour and Conservative homepages than on theirs. This observation includes the link to the internal social network, which was a technique popularised in the US and copied by all three major parties in the UK³⁰ (Plouffe, 2009). As with the pop-cultural memes, the homepages give the impression that potential resources within the digital campaign were underused by the party, a theme which will be returned too throughout the upcoming chapters.

Design of the Liberal Democrat homepage

The Liberal Democrat homepage was smaller than those of either Labour or the Conservatives and did not include the extensive list of internal links towards the bottom of the page designed to assist visitors in navigating directly to other parts of the site. However they did include a much smaller navigation bar at the bottom with links to regional party pages and two separate navigation bars at the top of the page, the first aimed at members and supporters with links for donations and members pages, the second for less involved visitors with more links to news and policy information. The page itself was divided into sections for policy, news and interactive social networking widgets encouraging supporters to 'get involved'. Unlike Labour and the Conservatives there was limited use of embedded video material mainly in the news section, within a subsection dedicated to highlighting a single issue or story. The site also made use of splash pages to promote their email list and encourage donations from visitors to their site. Like Labour the Liberal Democrats used a splash page to promote their manifesto although, unlike Labour, they did not include links to download the document and share it via Facebook and Twitter within that splash page.

Whilst the Liberal Democrat internal network Act could be accessed from the homepage via the 'Members' link in the navigation bar and a prominent sign up link in the 'Get Involved' section, external social networks were generally restricted to the three permanent links to Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, supplemented occasionally embedded video³¹. Even when providing memes specifically for replication - such as a splash page providing downloadable window posters - they placed an emphasis on the conversion of these into physical, printed posters, as opposed to online images such as Facebook profile pictures. This is consistent with their stated intention, clearly marked in their selection of material on their homepage, to covert digital support into offline

³⁰ See Appendix B

³¹ Unlike the Conservatives the Liberal Democrats did utilise some of the network potential of these links by using the embedded video slots to promote other videos from their YouTube page, the videos on the Conservative page simply replayed after watching. The videos from the Labour sample were corrupted and thus not available for analysis.

activism, something explicitly expressed to Williamson et al (2010) during interviews with campaign insiders. However from a memetic perspective it appears to be a missed opportunity to provide avenues for the replication of their memes and messages, which could be done with greater ease and accuracy via digital networks, reaching a wider audience of potential supporters than physical posters alone. It also suggests an imperfect replication of US campaign techniques with the notion of digital recruitment retained, but without the emphasis on digital message distribution and brand co-creation previously identified on Labour's homepage.

'Be Part of It'

The 'Be Part of It' campaign, in which they encouraged visitors to sign up to and join in with the Liberal Democrat election bid, was the clearest manifestation of the Liberal Democrat intention to link their online support with their offline campaign. The promotion of 'Be Part of It' on their homepage increased notably in the wake of Clegg's appearance on the first leaders' debate. This makes sense from the meme's eye view as the wider political environment became more receptive to Liberal Democrat memes after this exposure, as demonstrated by the poll surge the party experienced after the debate (Cutts et al., 2010). The choice of language in this campaign implied that the Liberal Democrats represented a movement as well as a party, and fed into the idea that something new and significant was afoot in politics - a nod to the rhetorical techniques used by Obama (see Sparkes-Vian, 2013) which could potentially be direct imitation.

The links in the 'Be Part of It' section of the homepage connect with the same information as the 'Get Involved' section which was already an established part of the site, combining the more traditional digital techniques such as email lists and donations with encouragements to find the party on Facebook, Twitter, and Act. However the notable absence of something as simple as buttons to promote sharing of material on Facebook hints at a strange one-way notion of this process where digital supporters are encouraged to leave the Internet and move into the real world, making them 'real' activists' - rather than seeing both online and offline support as a potential resource for the campaign. Although external social networks are promoted they are promoted in the same manner as the email list - not a tool with which supporters can propagate Liberal Democrat policies, ideas or internally constructed memes, but an additional means of receiving information from the Party. The invitation is to 'follow' the party on Facebook and Twitter, not to join them in a conversation or spread their messages throughout people's own social networks. If looked at from the meme's eye view what this means is that, rather than facilitating the easiest forms of promotion which require very little effort and energy expenditure, the party homepage was focused on

encouraging replication which required additional effort on behalf of the individual replicating those memes.

This may suggest a somewhat less digitally enlightened philosophy than generally associated with the Liberal Democrats who are usually the most comfortable of the UK parties with new campaign technologies (Lilleker et al., 2010, Williamson et al., 2010). Memetically the construction of the homepage appears designed to replicate its memes directly into the minds of visitors and if possible draw them in to receive more. Explicit encouragement to go further and replicate those memes to others is covered only rarely or implicitly, through calls to volunteer. However, this may be interpreted as a bulwark against 'slacktivism' (see Christensen, 2011, Rintel, 2013b), only those willing to navigate through several pages of the site will be encouraged to spread information on the party's behalf. It may also be a simple consequence of the compact design of the homepage with little space for repeated encouragements to spread the information within it. Either way the impression left is one of a surprisingly vertical communications style, especially when compared to Labour's 'Word of Mouth' campaign.

A page of emissary memes: Implications for propaganda theory

When the level at which homepage replication takes place was initially discussed in this chapter, it was argued that memes from a website could be seen as emissaries, competing within search engine algorithms in order to gain prominence and thus draw more minds to a site. As a consequence of the compact nature of the Liberal Democrat homepage, a similar argument can be made even once a person has decided to visit the site. The use of memes such as linked headlines and images on a homepage designed to draw people further into a website is by no means unique to the Liberal Democrat page. Within this corpus both Labour and the Conservatives use similar memes such as the headlines on the Conservatives 'Blue Blog' or the 'Inside the Campaign' section on Labour's site. However the Liberal Democrat homepage relies on such memes at the expense of content on the homepage. There were no images or text surrounding the headlines in their news section and very little text and no video in their scrolling banner.

This has interesting implications given the nature and structure of the homepage and the website when viewed through memetic lenses and the position of propaganda within memetic theory. The notion of propaganda as information which functions as an emissary for a much larger memplex was discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to competition within search engine algorithms. It was suggested that propaganda memes can replicate outside of the boundaries of the vehicle, drawing minds in to an environment dominated by memes from a specific memplex. Such a mind can then be colonised by further memes from that larger institutional or ideological memplex and

potentially converted into a mechanism for the further replication of memes. If the homepage is the gateway to a virtual representation of that memeplex within the distributed network of the Web, then once a person is there, they have already been exposed to enough emissary memes to encourage them to seek out more – in this case more Liberal Democrat memes. Taking this view suggests that composing a homepage largely of additional emissary memes designed to draw the viewer further into the Liberal Democrat site may be putting unnecessary barriers between interested citizens and ideas they may wish to internalise and even replicate. From the meme's eye view, whilst the emissary memes competing within a search engine might be competing with memes from rival parties – for example if someone searched for 'UK Election' or 'UK health policy' – once on a homepage emissary memes are by definition primarily competing with each other. This may suggest that over reliance on them was a poor design choice in terms of the easy replication of Liberal Democrat policy memes.

However, there is another possible interpretation if the perspective of the memeplex as a whole, rather than the individual memes is taken. Rather than immediately bombarding every visitor with suggestions that they might replicate Liberal Democrat memes on the party's behalf, a greater focus is put on drawing those visitors further into a digital space in which pro-Liberal Democrat memes can replicate unchallenged, given that the selection pressures determining which memes are copied onto the site come exclusively from within the party and the addition of memes from outsiders is kept within closed networks such as Act. This can be seen as a means to reinforce affiliation and support. If successful, the kind of constant encouragement to replicate the party's memes which characterised the Labour campaign would not be necessary; people would replicate the party's memes voluntarily and on their own initiative (Roach, 2006). Once drawn into the internal social network or the email list they are subject to repeated exposure to memes directly from the party and other supporters, this can help to circumvent the broadcast media and rebuff negative press coverage.

This notion of viewing memetics from the perspective of a memeplex or vehicle is distinct from the meme's eye view in that the meme's eye view allows a researcher to appreciate a memetic environment in terms of opportunities for the replication of a single meme. Expanding that methodological tool to include a wider appreciation of the kind of memes an individual might be exposed to in different environments and memetic competition between and within larger memeplexes could be a potential addition to the methodological toolkit outlined in Chapter 4.

Do not lie on the Internet

In his template for a successful online campaign, Howard Dean's campaign manager Joe Trippi (2004) argued that the nature of online campaigning required a level of honesty in both content and presentation which differed dramatically from accepted practice within a television campaign. He argued that the digital campaign relied on passionate, committed volunteers who wanted to feel close to the candidate. The slick production values of television adverts were therefore inappropriate and it was important not to say anything which would appear dishonest or insincere. In this case it appears that this particular propaganda technique failed to replicate in the context of the Liberal Democrat homepage.

It could be argued that the Liberal Democrats are hardly unique in making campaign claims which they failed to live up to once in office – the Conservative position on the environment for example has already been discussed - and the Liberal Democrat's post-election position as the smaller party in a coalition government did not give them the power to enact all of their policies. However the important message to draw from Trippi's (2004) observations is that such nuances do not matter when considering this kind of campaign strategy, at least not as much as the perception of dishonesty. It is of particular significance for the Liberal Democrats as they ran a campaign specifically on the notion of 'cleaning up politics' and produced a party political broadcast which attacked Labour and the Conservatives over their "broken promises" (Libdem, 2010a). This video is particularly interesting in light of Trippi's (2004) observations about honesty and from a memetic perspective.

The video itself is professionally produced, featuring scenes of Nick Clegg walking around London surrounded by blowing paper representing the broken promises of the 'two old parties' and repeating the claim that the Liberal Democrats represent a change towards 'fairness'. This is a party political broadcast designed for television, delivered via the Internet. Unlike Clegg's response to questions posed to him by users of the online community forum platform Reddit (Libdem, 2010b), which showed him sitting in an office talking into a webcam, or his responses to questions from the YouTube and Facebook hosted 'digital leaders' debate' which showed him filmed, apparently spontaneously, at an unspecific public event (ukelection, 2010), the production values of *Broken Promises* appear relatively high. The other, more personal messages were not distributed via the party homepage which used very little video throughout the campaign, with what it did use produced in the same professional style.

Liberal Democrats: say goodbye to broken promises and the more direct video produced for the Reddit interview both became memes in the pop cultural sense after the election was over. They did not however remain Liberal Democrat propaganda memes. The responses from posters such as the

National Union of Students (NUS) via their own YouTube channel, consisted of mash ups of the two videos contrasted with Liberal Democrat policy on tuition fees, highlighting the reversal of their position once in government. This response could be seen as confirmation of the warnings within the literature on US campaigning, not only from Trippi (2004) but also from campaign insiders cited by Vaccari (2008), who warned that propagating messages on the Internet is inherently uncontrollable. However, whilst the replication of pop-cultural memes has previously been identified with 'copy the instructions' memes and the alteration meaning via the replacement of a small number of alleles within the pop-cultural meme (see discussion Chapters 2 and 4), this example only follows that pattern in the sense that mash up videos are themselves an established form of Internet meme (Shifman, 2012). The original material from the Liberal Democrats is not only altered in meaning but in form and structure as well.

Conclusion: Evolution in progress

In keeping with this study's three research aims this chapter will conclude with an evaluation of the theoretical and methodological tools with which the party homepages have been analysed as well as a summary of the empirical findings. The methodological toolkit outlined in Chapter 4 is essentially a way to operationalise key memetic concepts in relation to the data in the analytical corpus. However the theoretical work outlined in the literature review specifically incorporates ideas from the literature on propaganda and as the replication of propaganda techniques is the only methodological technique which specifically addresses propaganda, the two categories can still be seen as distinct research aims. However the memetic concepts specifically identified within the methodology will be discussed in relation to the methodological tools designed to operationalise them.

Memetic methodology

Although all of the methodological tools outlined in Chapter 4 were deployed in this chapter they were not utilised to the same extent. This section will evaluate the analytical results obtained by using each tool as well as the utility of the theoretical concepts embodied within them to the analysis of propaganda.

Identify the level of replication

This tool was used in order to assess the nature of the homepage in relation to the wider Internet and its own constituent memes. It proved useful in terms of solidifying what can be considered a meme (in the academic sense) within the corpus of data and relating that specifically to the academic definition of the meme as any data which can potentially be replicated. Given the

confusion regarding the definition of the meme this can be considered a useful way to avoid the definitional misunderstandings which beset works such as Aunger's (2000a) *Darwinizing Culture*. This is especially true as the homepage occupies an awkward space, it can replicate as a coherent whole but does not do so easily (and in the case of this research its replication resulted in copy-errors). As a consequence it proved useful to address the homepage as a memetic vehicle.

If you are dealing with a memeplex, could it be considered a vehicle?

The question of whether or not a vehicle is even a legitimate or useful category for memetic evolution is not one which has been resolved within memetic theory. Blackmore (1999) for example suggests caution when exporting such genetic concepts into memetic thought. To a certain extent the ambiguous status of the homepage in this regard appears to vindicate her scepticism. Whilst it is possible to replicate a homepage as a coherent unit (thus making it a meme) it is much more practical to view it as a vehicle which produces and protects emissary memes that replicate on its behalf, drawing in minds to facilitate the further replication of its constituent memes. For example, this approach allowed for a useful analysis of the homepage as a competitive meme within search engine algorithms. The fact that the concept can be practically useful despite including examples which could also be classified as memes or memeplexes, could be seen as a vindication of the qualitative methodological approach which, unlike some categorical quantitative methods (for example chi square distribution (Field, 2009)) does not require exclusivity in its categorisation.

Disaggregate the memeplex into its constituent alleles. Does the alteration of an allele change the meaning of the meme?

As it was possible to treat the homepage as a vehicle, all of the analysis which included the evaluation of constituent memes, be they the links to the homepage replicating out in the wider Web, or the replication of environmentalist symbols on the Conservative party homepage all involved the disaggregation of a larger memeplex. However the specific utility of this tool, to understand how the alteration of one or two alleles can cause a dramatic change in the nature of propaganda as a meme spreads was not sufficiently tested in this chapter. This aspect of the methodology is likely to be more useful when addressing the pop-cultural rather than the academic meme and will thus be evaluated further in Chapter's 7 and 8.

Is this a 'copy the product', or 'copy the instructions' meme?

The notion of the 'copy the instructions' meme proved particularly useful in terms of analysing the kind of viral replication which Labour attempted to promote via their Word of Mouth campaign. The idea of embedding the instruction to replicate a meme has already been explored by Dawkins

(2006c) in the context of religious memes and to a lesser extent Roach (2006) in terms of memetic marketing. The fact that in this instance the use of 'copy the instructions' memes was ineffective highlights the importance of understanding memetic replication as a dialectical process built on the relationship between a meme's content and the environment in which it finds itself.

Take the meme's eye view. What opportunities for replication exist within this environment?

This is the best established qualitative methodological technique from memetics. The ability to view an environment from the perspective of a replicator stems directly from thought experiments done in genetic work - Dawkins (2006b, 1999, 2006a) for example uses this approach frequently. It remains useful in memetic though in terms of appreciating the opportunities for replication (or lack thereof) inherent within specific memetic environments - for example it was useful when exploring the reasons why Labour's 'Word of Mouth' campaign had so little traction despite deploying a reasonably accurate replication of techniques which had succeeded in the US. The problem with this approach when assessing propaganda however is that the environment in which an individual meme replicates can be shaped and replication guided by propagandists with more foresight than a mindless replicator. It may therefore be necessary to add an additional methodological technique which attempts to understand a memetic environment on a macro-level, looking at how and why those opportunities for replication are created or repressed in a more political context. This is a possibility which will be explored in more detail in the forthcoming chapters.

Identify the propaganda techniques used to facilitate memetic replication within the data corpus. Have they been replicated from elsewhere?

Within this specific case study replication of propaganda techniques is indicated by the literature; a range of 'copy me' techniques which have been established and codified by US campaigners and observers (Trippi, 2004, Plouffe, 2009, Davis, 2005) were in evidence - particularly on the Labour homepages - alongside claims both in the academic literature on the campaign (Williamson et al., 2010), and in the media (MacMillan, 2010, Wintour, 2010b, Wintour, 2010a) that the UK parties were attempting to imitate the approach taken by Obama for America in 2008. A chain of replication from 2004 in the US through to 2010 in the UK is therefore indicated, in addition to the longer history of technique replication and alteration explored in Chapter 3. However the other techniques identified within the literature, such as the use of Testimonial inherent in sourcing endorsements from members of the public via Twitter, is less clear cut in terms of replication. Whilst the use of some of the older propaganda techniques identified in the literature review were in evidence, they are too deeply embedded within communication practices to actively demonstrate a chain of

replication in this instance. However there is a clear indication that specific techniques used within this election - for example design for search optimisation - have been codified as 'copy the instructions' memes and replicated via institutionalised, pedagogical means.

Memetic propaganda theory

As is clear from the discussion of the methodological techniques used within this chapter, the notion of independently replicating propaganda techniques has received some validation from this analysis. This claim is made on the grounds that established techniques which first appeared in the US have been utilised in the UK by parties which have specifically claimed to be emulating the US campaigners for whom those techniques were previously successful. Thus this can be seen as a common sense indication of copying, rather than absolute proof of replication. Nevertheless such an indication does bolster the theory that propaganda can be seen as an evolving concept facilitated by the replication of techniques which themselves facilitate the replication of other memes. However the relative ineffectiveness of the specific techniques of propaganda developed in relation to digital technology and campaign tools (such as the use of copy me techniques and horizontal promotion via Social Networking Applications (SNAs)) indicates the importance of understanding such techniques in the context of the environment in which they are metaphorically attempting to replicate. Despite being far less hospitable to such memes than the US election in 2008, replication was still identifiable, albeit often imperfect and less than effectual.

Empirical analysis

The empirical analysis of the homepages sub-corpus suggests that the Labour Party was the most enthusiastic at emulating the notion of the horizontally replicating message and the utilisation of supporter networks already used in the US. However the position of the party as an incumbent with an unpopular leader made this a difficult environment in which to run such a campaign. By contrast the Conservatives favoured the use of slick, professional design and the novelty (at least in the UK) of techniques such as the promotion of merchandising. They did provide tools for activists to get involved in their campaign but the tone with which they were presented was more top-down and proscriptive than the attitude taken by Labour. Both the Labour and Conservative campaigns demonstrate evidence of a hybrid campaign structure in which horizontal propaganda techniques are in evidence but within a hierarchical framework. However if the communications structure is seen as a spectrum from hierarchical to horizontal, the Conservative campaign was clearly closer to the hierarchical end than Labour, possibly because Labour's relative lack of finance encouraged a greater reliance on other campaign resources, specifically those embodied in their supporter networks.

The most instantly conspicuous attribute of the Liberal Democrat homepage was its size; it was smaller than either Labour or the Conservatives' pages and contained less information. This consequently meant less in the way of obvious propaganda techniques although it was complemented with the use of splash pages to promote greater engagement. However even their promotion of activism seemed somewhat incoherent in terms of communication structure and the relationship between physical and digital campaigning. They promoted top-down digital techniques such as email lists (a long standing technique favoured by all three campaigns but emphasised slightly more on the Liberal Democrat page) whilst failing to integrate digital social networks as prominently as either of their rivals. This was characteristic of a campaign which appeared to see digital information as a gateway to 'real' offline campaigning rather than a symbiotic vehicle for Liberal Democrat memes which could be spread either online or off. This is in some ways a surprising result given that the Liberal Democrat party spawned some of the only positive pop-cultural memes of the campaign, indicating an environment conducive to the replication of Liberal Democrat memes. The next chapter will examine pop-cultural memes in more depth, examining the nature and extent to which viral propaganda was in evidence during the 2010 election.

Chapter Seven: Satirical Memes, Convergence and Not-Very-Viral Video

Whilst Chapter 6 looked at the party homepages largely from the perspective of the academic meme, this chapter will look more closely at the pop-cultural memes of the 2010 election and the environment in which they propagated. Such memes are especially characteristic of the digital realm, including digital campaigns, and therefore a discussion of them is crucial to analysing the memetics of propaganda in 2010. In particular this chapter will focus on examples of citizen generated propaganda as manifest in the Obama 2008 campaign (as discussed in [Sparkes-Vian as] Vian, 2011) although it will also examine *WebCameron*; the Conservative Party YouTube channel which produced a selection of viral videos during the campaign.

In keeping with the methodological conclusions from Chapter 6, this chapter will explore different ways of analysing the environment in which the pop-cultural memes of 2010 replicated (or failed to replicate). This will be achieved initially by focusing specifically on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter as the three most prominent social networking sites during the 2010 election. It will investigate the relative distribution of followers during the period of the short campaign and analyse the results in light of the conclusions reached in Chapter 6 about the possible value of expanding on the 'meme's eye view' as a method for exploring the memetics of a given environment. This will provide a necessary environmental context for the analysis of pop-cultural memes and the more detailed analysis of Facebook use to follow in Chapter 8, as well as providing additional material for the evaluation of the memetic methodological toolkit presented in Chapter 4.

The later sections of this chapter will look more specifically at Internet memes and viral (or less than viral) video and its distribution during the campaign, the analytical approach will combine the application of the theoretical work on the academic meme (for example the notion of the allele and the 'copy the product'/'copy the instructions' distinction) with an exploration of relevant pop-cultural memes within the timeframe of the case study. This empirical work will focus on the more satirical memes such as the spoof campaign posters distributed through *mydavidcameron.com* and the hashtag <#nickcleggsfault>. The justification for this focus relates to this project's theoretical research aims as the relationship between satire, propaganda and counter-propaganda may be especially salient when taking a memetic approach due to the importance of cumulative selection within evolutionary theory. Both the meaning and content within a satirical meme relies, builds on and subverts those within that meme's previous iteration. This will also allow for a discussion of counter-propaganda within memetic theory, a topic which has been referred to in previous chapters

but not yet explored in detail. The later sections will deal with two differing yet relatively successful memes from the election 'I agree with Nick' which was the closest the election came to producing the type of citizen replicated (although not 100% generated) propaganda which was so characteristic of the Obama campaign ([Sparkes-Vian as] Vian, 2011)³², and *WebCameron* - a selection of viral videos produced by the Conservative party which proved relatively effective replicators but did not result in a great deal of variation or co-creation. These two memes were selected because as examples of citizen generated propaganda and centrally produced viral marketing, they represent distinct categories of propagandistic pop-cultural meme, categories which could potentially be utilised within other studies in the future.

Network convergence and social media use

The use of Social Networking Applications (SNAs) within the election both by parties and citizens is highly relevant to the distribution and replication of digital propaganda. Whilst memes may be replicated via any social connection, the digital replication of a meme allows for greater accuracy and thus integrity of message - unless its meaning is deliberately altered. However addressing such digital networks as isolated and separate from the wider social and media networks in which political action takes place is precisely the kind of mistake which led the digital sceptics criticised by Wright (2012) to undervalue the role of digital media. It suggests that to be significant they must be uniquely influential rather than an interconnected part of the wider media environment in which memes are replicated. This section will show that citizens were generally drawn to such sites at the same time as the TV debates took place on broadcast media (including online broadcast media such as YouTube). It will argue that the convergence of media surrounding such an event does not suggest - as has been argued in the literature (Allen and Mead, 2011, Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010, Wring and Ward, 2010b), that this was a 'TV election' rather than an 'Internet election', rather it suggests that television debates themselves are made richer and more complex events by their position within the diverse media environment which characterises the digital age. In order to make this argument it will be necessary to further develop the broader 'memetic environment' methodological tool discussed in Chapter 6.

Facebook³³

During the 2010 election all three of the major parties had a Facebook page along with some smaller parties including The Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, The Green Party and The British National Party. The following analysis will focus on the public's engagement with the pages of the three main

³² The author's name has changed since this paper was published.

³³ For dataset see Appendices C and F.

parties; Labour, the Conservatives and The Liberal Democrats. The pages provided by the political parties during the 2010 election were not the standard profiles generated by individuals but organisational/institutional pages with additional features. They were public and provided a forum for general discussion and a conduit by which the party could distribute material. This included sections linking to policy documents and manifestos in addition to the ability of the party to communicate with supporters via their Facebook wall. Such information could therefore be propagated through the various networks of fans and visitors to the party pages, using the mechanisms provided by the network which ensure digital accuracy and a uniformity of presentation. As with the homepages in the previous analysis, the party pages can be viewed as (quasi) vehicles³⁴ with individual posts as memes replicating as emissaries that encourage people to visit their party's page. However, due to the greater degree of interactivity within the social network when compared to the homepage, and the overarching control possessed by Facebook as a corporation, the environment in which these memes are replicating can be seen as qualitatively different to that outside of the <<http://www.facebook.com>> domain. This is a matter which this section will also seek to elaborate on, and in doing so it will further the possibility of a 'memetic environment' methodological tool.

So what does the memetic environment of the Facebook network look like? In the terminology of network theory Facebook is, in common with other social networking sites, a virtually distributed network. That is it superficially maintains the horizontal connective features of a 'truly' distributed network but under the hierarchical control of Facebook Inc. Physically this is in terms of its location within the <<http://www.facebook.com>> domain and politically it is in terms of the power this allows the corporation over the memes circulated within it, a matter which is becoming increasingly more controversial as Facebook seeks to utilise that power to influence its users (Arthur, 2014). Joss Hands (2011) elaborates in detail on the significance of the difference between these two kinds of network and the implications for activists which may result from the hidden hierarchy and power structures it contains. In memetic terms Facebook as a company (and an institutional memeplex) controls both the design of the Facebook network and the standardised ways in which information may be replicated through it - such as 'becoming a fan' of a page, 'liking' a post or 'sharing' a link. From the meme's eye view, success depends on a capacity to encourage people to engage in such actions, to capitalise on the opportunities for replication which exist within that network. However the meme's eye view is limited here as it sees only the immediate opportunities for replication and not the embedded structure of hierarchical control manifest throughout the network. It is this partially

³⁴ Like the homepages it was technically possible to replicate the party Facebook pages for the purposes of this study but this replication resulted in copy errors and was not facilitated by the network.

hidden hierarchy which creates a greater level of uniformity in terms of opportunities for replication - every post has access to the 'like' and 'share' mechanisms - but also the potential for the abuse of that hierarchical control. This is in addition to the self-generating 'hidden hierarchies' which tend to immerge naturally within formally distributed networks (Gerbaudo, 2012, Freeman, 1972, Shirky, 2008).

Facebook, in common with the successful practice amongst Web 2.0 companies, is an application designed to facilitate peer to peer communication and thus memetic replication (Meikle and Young, 2012). For example, during the 2010 campaign Facebook altered some of the mechanisms of replication by changing the way in which the public could interact with organisational profiles such as those maintained by the UK political parties. Speculation in the blogosphere, based on what was ostensibly a leaked memo from Facebook, suggested that the decision to change the option to become a 'fan' of a page to 'liking' it was intended to further facilitate the replication of brands across the network (Ostrow, 2010) by making following a page appear a more "lightweight action" (Facebook, 2010). Whilst there is no evidence that this limited hierarchical alteration had any impact on any of the parties analysed here, it does illustrate the capacity for an overarching body to define the rules of replication within Facebook as an environment. It also illustrates that the rules of replication in terms of that overarching hierarchy are being applied universally across the network, and thus a meme's success is based on the level of differential replication it can realise within the context of those rules. It should be noted that whilst such an egalitarian perspective may be legitimate when analysing competing memes from the three main political parties, there are some indications that for those outside such elite groups, the hierarchical control criticised by Hands (2011) has asserted a more politically motivated form of selection pressure. For example claims by activists that a mass purge of group pages took place in the run up to the Royal Wedding in 2011 (Malik, 2011) and claims on behalf of Facebook itself that they had "taken measures to remove credible threats" (Dick et al., 2012:2) with respect to the riots which took place in the same year. This is a kind of targeted selection pressure which would be less easy to implement in a really distributed network, despite more recent attempts to assert a greater degree of control over Web content via Internet Service Providers (ISPs) (Penny, 2014).

Both the 'fan' and the 'like' suggest that memes on Facebook replicate with the explicit endorsement of a peer, this relates to several of the techniques described in the older literature on propaganda, such as Glittering Generality, Testimonial and Bandwagon. When replicated in sufficient numbers within a network a collection of pro-party memes can give the impression of wide ranging support for that party, although the clustering nature of online political opinion could call into

question the veracity of the impression (McPherson et al., 2001, Iyengar and Hahn, 2009). The Testimonial effect of replication by a peer is also relevant to more recent work on online campaigning (see Chapter 3). The individual supporter has less motivation to dishonesty than the politician seeking office and if they are a friend in the general rather than the specific 'Facebook' sense of the word (see Meikle and Young, 2012), their opinion may hold weight within their peer group where a centrally distributed political advert would provoke scepticism. However as these techniques are - like Facebook's switch from 'fan' to 'like' - universal, successful replication becomes a differential competition, success means developing new techniques to get more likes than competing memes because 'likes', comments and 'shares' are a universal mechanism for replication within this environment. That is, from the meme's eye view the amalgamation of the traditional techniques of propaganda with the architecture of Facebook as a network, conveys an advantage to those best able to exploit those techniques. The universal features such as the 'like' are equally applied and thus confer little or no differential advantage to any party. However the successful exploitation of those features via the 'copy me' techniques outlined in Chapter 3 may be less evenly distributed - a matter which will be examined in more detail in Chapter 8.

Interest in party Facebook pages during the 2010 campaign

The overall number of fans/likes was consistently higher for the Conservatives than Labour, meaning that their memes had a differential advantage in replication. From the meme's eye view, each fan/like represents both an endorsement, and a newsfeed in which memes will be replicated, exposing them to others in the fan's network. If the Facebook page is viewed as a vehicle (with the posts as replicators), such memes can be seen as emissaries which draw people into the party page (as discussed in relation to homepage replication via search engines in Chapter 6). In terms of the rate of increase in interest however, the two parties exhibit very similar trends. A steady increase throughout the election period with increases in the rate of fan/like acquisition during electoral landmarks such as the day the election was called and polling day, with a levelling out after the formation of the coalition government. The gradual increase may be consistent with internal network proliferation as well as increased public interest in the parties as a result of general media focus on the election. The collective responses to specific electoral milestones could be seen as an example of the 'party-shower'³⁵ effect in which an external collective event inspires people to adopt similar behaviours simultaneously without memetic transmission, specifically as a consequence of their "perception and interpretation of the event...and their consequent feeling of powerlessness" (Conte, 2000:101), i.e. people responded to the announcement of the election by deciding to look

³⁵ A reference to the collective move indoors by a people at an outdoor party when it begins to rain.

up the party on Facebook rather than imitating someone else and liking a party's page. A similar argument could be made for the dramatic increase in interest experienced by the Liberal Democrats in the wake of Nick Clegg's successful performance in the leaders' debates. However, unlike the typical 'party-shower effect', the decision to engage with a party on Facebook involved memetic transmission, even if the action of 'liking' was not an example of it. Watching the leaders' debates or reading a news report in which the election was announced still involves the transmission of a meme. In keeping with other examples of the effect, the collective upsurge in Facebook interest also has memetic consequences in that their collective but non-imitative response, results in an alteration of the environment in which memes are replicating. From the meme's eye view there is an increase in the potential avenues of proliferation of party political memes throughout the Facebook network as more 'fans' increases the proliferation of posts on people's newsfeeds. From the perspective of the page as a vehicle, this means the potential to draw in more individuals who may in turn, choose to replicate the constituent emissary memes available on the page itself.

*Twitter*³⁶

Whilst Twitter's structure, which is also an overarching 'virtually distributed network' (Hands, 2011), is similar to Facebook's there are differences in the way Twitter facilitates the replication of the memes within that structure. Unlike Facebook the endorsement aspect of the 'like' is replaced by the more neutral 'follow' making interaction on the network a less reliable indicator of online support for a party. Nevertheless, many of the same principal environmental rules apply in terms of opportunities for replication for a meme; Tweets sent out to followers can replicate further by being 're-Tweeted' to others in their network in a similar way to the proliferation of memes through likes and shares on Facebook. Thus from the meme's eye view, more connections in terms of followers, means a greater number of opportunities for replication. From the perspective of the party presence on Twitter, such memes also have the potential to act as emissaries, encouraging people to sign up to the feed and thus receive the party's Tweets directly. In addition there is the hashtag which Romero et al (2011) have analysed specifically as examples of successful memes on Twitter and which facilitate the proliferation of individual Tweets by linking them to wider conversations. This provides an additional level of replication at which to discuss the proliferation of memes throughout the Twitter network. The evolution of this mechanism for propagation is a perfect example of the way in which alterations in the technological environment of communication can facilitate new techniques of propaganda, and also the moral neutrality of such techniques when access to them is universal within a given network. Examples of relevant hashtags during the 2010 election include

³⁶ For data examples see Appendices E and H.

<#ge2010> and <#leadersdebate> as well as <#nickcleggsfault> which will be addressed in more detail in the section on satire and counter-propaganda. One of the reasons why the model proposed within Romero et al's (2011) study focused so little on variation, was that once established, the hashtag proved highly stable as a replicator, exhibiting very little variation. This suggests that the use of the hashtag is itself an implicit 'copy the instructions' meme, with the accurate imitation of an already existing hashtag as a more specific variant of that replicator.

In terms of differential replication of Party memes on Twitter, the Conservatives had a consistent advantage in terms of followers, there were more people signed up to receive their Tweets and potentially replicate them further throughout the network. The Liberal Democrats and Labour exchanged places after the first leaders' debate following a sharp increase in interest in the Liberal Democrats; this mirrors the general pattern of interaction on Facebook where significant events within the election, both media and procedural, correlate with an increase in social media activity (something which will be discussed further in Chapter 8). However, whilst their advantage in terms of followers would have increased the replicator power of Conservative Tweets, they used this avenue of communication less frequently than Labour, although more than the Liberal Democrats³⁷.

Satire and propaganda in 2010

There is a marked contrast, not only in the environment but also in the content of many of the more notable memes from the UK 2010 election when compared to the 'Internet Election' the US experienced in 2008. A broad overview of some of the popular memes from that election, (as provided in [Sparkes-Vian as] Vian, 2011) shows a myriad of explicitly propagandistic memes - designed by Obama's supporters to further his candidacy. These included for example, Shepard Faery's infamous 'Hope' poster, Obama Girl (a song and music video) and will.i.am's viral video in which Obama's New Hampshire Primary concession speech was set to music. They replicated alongside a specifically pro-Obama message, thus acting as emissaries for his candidacy. The structure of the US presidential campaign system requires the creation of a specific institutional body with its own coherent structure, much less integrated into the political party structures than in the UK's parliamentary system (Plouffe, 2009), it is therefore easier to argue that the campaign itself represents a discrete vehicle for the protection and propagation of endorsement memes for the candidate, although it could be argued that the entire party structure within a parliamentary system forms a massive institutional memplex which can be viewed as a vehicle. Although there were examples (to be addressed in the final sections of this chapter) of pro-candidate memes in 2010, there were also memes such as the *mydavidcameron.com* posters and the hashtag

³⁷ Average tweets per day Lab:10.30 Con: 9.63. Lib:6.03, see Appendix H.

<#nickcleggsfault> which worked differently. These memes, as with the satirical anti-Hilary Clinton viral video from 2008 ([Sparkes-Vian as] Vian, 2011), propagate through a combination of humour and negativity i.e. through satire. Therefore, before they can be addressed specifically, they must be put into context in terms of the literature on satire and elections.

Memetics and satire

Comedy can be seen as a 'good trick' from the meme's-eye-view, one which has been demonstrated to increase replicator power (Shifman, 2012). Jokes are also an excellent example of a meme for those encountering the concept for the first time; they are small, self-contained, cultural units which can be picked up, easily remembered and passed on to others as a whole or with tiny, incremental variations (Shifman and Thelwall, 2009). This was confirmed in the pop-cultural context by Shifman, who found that comedy to be a "key feature of internet memes" (2012:195). Humour is also arguably a social experience, Critchley for example, refers to a "tacit social contract" (2002:4) which makes sense of humorous forms. As such, when something makes us laugh we seek to share it, however the use of humour as a propaganda technique is a more subtle and complex notion than simply the argument that if humour increases replicator power, all humour is propagandistic. As with all propaganda under the memetic lens, it makes no sense to talk about it in the abstract, only in connection to the propagation of specific ideas and actions. For example the propagation of racist or misogynistic jokes can be seen as an emissary for other racist or misogynistic ideas; as the notions replicate alongside humour they can pave the way for other more complex ideas which would otherwise meet resistance through cognitive dissonance. The imitative practices inherent in satire also provide an added memetic element to satirical memes in addition to their viral spread. The imitation of journalistic tropes and syntactic structures for example, are discussed by Ian Reilly (2011, 2012) although in terms of classic mimetics rather than memetics.

In the context of an election campaign, a simple, linear model of transmission in which a person is exposed to a negative satirical representation of a candidate and therefore begins to exhibit negative feelings towards them would not be anticipated by memetic theory. An idea can gain access to a person's mind through repeated exposure (see Romero et al., 2011 for evidence of this on Twitter), or the idea or its accompanying packaging (i.e. the propaganda techniques embedded within the meme carrying the idea) resonates in some way with the memes already contained within a person's mind³⁸. The ecological perspectives embodied in memetic theory suggest a dialectical

³⁸ This would explain why Baumgartner's (2008) study found a correlation between viewing satire and political participation, the satirical memes resonate in the mind of activists because they are participants in the same "tacit social contract" (see Critchley, 2002:4) with relation to politics, and thus understand the framework which makes such jokes amusing.

relationship between meme and environment, in which the popularity of a satirical meme may be as much indicative of the political environment in which it spreads as a cause or hindrance to action. In terms of the UK 2010 election, the anti-politics feeling noted in Chapter 5 is unsurprisingly manifest in the more popular memes of the campaign. From the meme's eye view there were more opportunities for replication for humorous memes which lampooned politics and politicians than for the kind of unambiguous citizen generated propaganda which marked the Obama candidacy. Rather than being just a stimulus to a negative view of politicians as suggested by Baumgartner (2008), satirical memes resonate with (and are replicated by) those who already hold similar opinions and the process reinforces ideas and beliefs which already exist within the body politic. In propaganda terms this is comparable to the pre-propaganda identified by Ellul (1973) in that it forms a subtle, almost a-political tool for the subsequent spread of political ideas, but unlike Ellul's model, this is taking place in a very different communications environment. For Ellul (1973) when such propaganda spread it was because an elite group was using broadcast media to spread it, with the intention of subsequently broadcasting more specific, action based propaganda which resonates with those initial ideas. In an environment in which anyone can produce this form of cumulative, underlying persuasion it can be seen in a different light - as a qualitative indication of a culture's zeitgeist, something which Paul Mason (2013) also observed in relation to the proliferation of political pop-cultural memes. This is not to suggest that the powerful do not have greater advantages in terms of influencing the national mood, just that in the case of the 2010 election, the presence of the Web allowed less influential citizens to voice their displeasure through the proliferation of humorous memes.

The satirical memes of 2010

Cross-party public negativity towards the Conservative Party and their top-down poster campaign was clearly manifest during the 2010 election through the popularity of *mydavidcameron.com*. The website featured a selection of photo-shopped pastiches of the Conservative Party's campaign posters, reconfigured to convey a humorous anti-Conservative message (See Appendix K for examples of originals and variants of this meme.) Unlike many of the memes from the 2010 election there is still a considerable body of evidence on the spread and mutation of the images from this site as Clifford Singer, the architect of *mydavidcameron.com*, collected and published the data - a fact which goes some way to ameliorating the difficulties in doing historical, digital research discussed in Chapter 4.

Looking first at the construction of the Conservative posters as memes it is easy to see why they spread so effectively. The combination of symbols, texts and images is configured in such a way that

the meme contains a set of implicit instructions for the construction of the meme as a whole, allowing specific elements to be radically altered whilst still remaining recognisable as a variant of the original poster. The constituent elements within each design such as images, text and logos, can be seen as alleles. When these are exchanged for other memes it alters the meaning of the original poster and creates a new variant of the poster as a meme which can then propagate throughout the body politic. There were three posters for which *mydavidcameron.com* provided image macros allowing anyone to create their own variations on the original designs. Some of these crowd sourced pastiches were then chosen to be displayed on the *mydavidcameron.com* site. The provision of a macro is a further demonstration that the posters constitute 'copy the instructions' memes. The macro itself is essentially a set of instructions for the replication of specific aspects of the initial meme, but with the option to alter individual alleles and thus change both the meaning and the propagandistic effect of the designs it produces.

The first poster featured an image of David Cameron with the accompanying text 'We can't go on like this. I'll cut the deficit, not the NHS'. The image gained notoriety after rumours in the press that it had been digitally altered to make Cameron more presentable (Parry, 2010) - a metaphor for his PR background that was not lost on those who chose to replicate the image as satire. In the bottom left the slogan 'Year for Change' appears above details of the party's website. In the revised versions of the meme 'Year for Change' was often altered to 'Airbrushed for Change', retaining the aesthetic of the original logo. The image of Cameron's face could also be altered by increasing the smoothness in mockery of the subtler airbrushing of the original image, or replaced entirely, for example one variant featured Margaret Thatcher's spitting image puppet with a David Cameron Mask falling from its face. The text itself was also radically altered in many of the variations, although most kept the original font and colour, helping to maintain the integrity of the meme throughout the iterations. For example many chose to focus on the issue of the digitally manipulated image and used this to argue that Cameron was himself false and untrustworthy. This included replacing the text with the Madame Tussauds logo in one and the substitution of the original text for the slogan "Maybe he's born with it. Maybe it's Maybelline." in another. Others combined the alteration in text with an alteration in Cameron's image such as replacing him with a character from the animated film *Avatar* alongside the text "No digital effects have been used on this poster" or in reference to the reputation of the Conservatives as 'the nasty party' "Vote Conservative. Or I'll kill this kitten." with the addition of a kitten picture and the text "No actual kittens have been harmed. Yet." in place of the website information.

The second poster referred to the Conservative pledge to cut inheritance tax which dated back to the aborted election of 2007 (Rawnsley, 2010). In stark contrast to the bright, corporate glossiness of the previous image this was more negative and in shades of grey. It depicted a tombstone in keeping with their practice of renaming the levy the 'Death Tax' - an example of Name Calling which can be traced back to the US Republican pollster Jim Martin in the early 1990s (Green, 2001). The text on the original poster was split between the tombstone reading "R.I.P. OFF", and a 'call and answer' motif depicted through font size reading "Now Gordon wants £20,000 when you die" then smaller underneath, "Don't vote for Labour's new death tax". Many of the subsequent iterations kept the R.I.P. from the original but altered the surrounding text, for example to "Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter X Here." followed by an image of the Conservative name on a ballot paper or "Thatcherism's not dead. It was just resting". Others actively criticised the negativity of the campaign, e.g. "We've tried being positive. Now we're going negative" and one sarcastically lamenting the death of the previous, more positive "Tory Marketing Strategy". There were also warnings about what would 'die' if the Conservatives were to gain office, including foxes (a reference to Conservative opposition to the Hunting ban), the BBC (next to a picture of Rupert Murdoch) and Economic Recovery (in opposition to proposed spending cuts). Although it is not universal, the replication of this meme tended to copy not only the form but also the tone of the original image, with more serious criticisms of the Party and a darker edge to the humour than in the previous example (references to zombie Margaret Thatcher notwithstanding).

The final poster made available on the site was from a campaign intended to appeal to first time Conservative voters and featured a variety of potential supporters including, a blue collar worker, smiling mother with her children and a young, black student. The slogan "I've never voted Tory before but..." was repeated on each and followed by a different reason such as "we need to sort out the economy" or "I like their plans to help families". The aesthetic of the meme is easily recognisable even if the text is changed and the macro provided by *mydavidcameron.com* gave people the option to alter the text, whilst retaining the distinctive font and layout, as well as substituting a different image and a different party colour for the text background. Some of the variations simply altered the payoff to the slogan, so the blue collar worker's text became "I've never voted Tory before. I may be working class but I'm not a f**king idiot" whilst the family scene was captioned "I've never voted Tory before, because I'm 7 and I like the Power Rangers". Others also altered the image such as replacing the picture with one of Tony and Cherie Blair captioned "We've never voted Tory before, but we like their plans to cut inheritance tax for multi-millionaires". As this shows, the targets of these satirical memes were not restricted to the Conservative Party - something welcomed by the site's organisers

who, whilst avowedly anti-Tory, promoted the site as serving all left of centre parties and those of no political affiliation (Singer, 2010a).

The site itself stopped accepting entries to the main website (although the image generators are still online as of April 2014) and the developers decided not to continue providing the same service during subsequent poster campaigns. In part this was due to the worry that the idea would become stale, something which they believed had been indicated by the production of an anti-Labour site taking the same motif. Labour too cited *mydavidcameron.com* as an inspiration for their own digital poster competition as discussed in the Chapter 6 (Wintour, 2010a). This propaganda/counter-propaganda relationship suggests a similar trend to the male/female response pattern observed by Shifman and Thelwall (2009) in their study of a pop-cultural meme in the form of an online joke, although the originators of *mydavidcameron.com* criticised the response for replacing the more gentle wit of the originals with a nastier, aggressive edge which he claimed, dulled the original humorous intentions of the meme (Singer, 2010b). The replication of both the posters and the imitation of the use of image macros to satirise an opponent's poster campaign, demonstrates that even within an election in which the digital elements of the campaigns were not generally considered central (Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010), techniques of digital propaganda were still replicating, and thus potentially still evolving.

The spread of the mydavidcameron.com memes

Unlike much of the material from the 2010 election, the spread of the posters from *mydavidcameron.com* is still at least partially available and published by the site's creator Clifford Singer via the *mydavidcameron.com* blog. According to Singer's records the site gained over "340,486 visits from 252,641 unique visitors in its first six weeks" (2010c, original emphasis removed), although he suggests that because of the popularity of individual images on social networking sites such as Facebook and the fact that he did not record visits and links to individual pages just the homepage, these numbers are probably an underestimation of the real total. As with the previous trends for social media use during this period discussed at the beginning of this chapter, these figures demonstrate the way in which successful memes replicate within and across multiple kinds of media network. The top five referrals to his site included both Facebook and Twitter, whilst the top ten included popular email lists and content aggregation/distribution sites such as *Stumbleupon* and *b3ta* as well as the websites of three left of centre newspapers (*The Guardian*, *The Mirror* and *The Independent*).

In particular Singer argues that Twitter stimulated interest across different social networks and the wider Web, leading to the effective replication of the posters.

Twitter users had spread the message to Facebook and then both sets of users had spread it to the wider online world via good old fashioned email. Some might even have told others verbally...We announce new posters in Twitter and Facebook and that triggers a growth in visitors outside of those platforms. It's essentially what enabled us to contest a £500,000 Tory advertising campaign at zero cost. (Singer, 2010b)

In addition, when well-known Twitter users with a large following Tweeted links to *mydavidcameron.com*, these were followed with huge increases in traffic - and with it the potential increase in replicator power for any of the posters considered as memes. The comedian Bill Bailey for example, Tweeted a link to the site on March 1st 2010 and the number of visitors jumped from 307 to 3704 almost instantly. Within the context of Twitter, not only is the hashtag an evolved technique for increasing the replicator power of individual Tweets, the practice of targeting well known and influential individuals on Twitter is an evolved variation on Testimonial, translating their popularity on the network into an increase in replicator power.

The popularity of the site itself also owes something to the decision to balance the use of crowd sourcing with "good old-fashioned editorial control" (ibid.) This meant refraining from posting images to the site which were either repetitive (Singer mentions huge numbers of depictions of Cameron as a 'toff') or ad homonym attacks, especially those featuring excessive profanity. This hybrid approach to digital campaigning is very familiar in terms of the Obama model in which the variety available via the Internet hive-mind is given focus and direction through a central, co-ordinating authority. This is unsurprising as Singer's site was specifically intended as counter-propaganda, not simply as entertainment. However the non-editorialised versions were still able to replicate throughout the Web itself, they were simply not promoted via the *mydavidcameron.com* hub meaning that any data on the wider replication of the *mydavidcameron.com* posters during the 2010 election would by now be inaccurate (Pollard, 2012) (see discussion in Chapter 4). Whilst Labour claimed to have been inspired in their own poster competition by Clifford Singer's site (Wintour, 2010a) it is notable that Singer chose to mitigate the editorial role he publically championed (Singer, 2010b) by allowing visitors to his site vote for their favourite poster designs, Labour by contrast chose to delegate this responsibility to Saatchi and Saatchi with less than successful results. However, like the Labour example, the use of editorial control can still be seen as a form of selection pressure through structural hierarchy, as opposed to selection by the kind of hidden or informal hierarchies which Gerbaudo (2012) observes are typical of interactions within virtually distributed social networks.

<#nickcleggsfault>

As already noted, memes within Twitter can replicate not only at the level of the individual Tweet but also at the level of the hashtag, in fact as Romero et al's (2011) work demonstrates, the latter is a more typical level to address when discussing the pop-cultural meme. The hashtag <#nickcleggsfault> spread as a meme on Twitter as a response to hostile press coverage of Nick Clegg following his success in the first television debate. Early Tweets within this meme recorded by Danny Sullivan (2010) indicate a direct response to material published in *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph*. A conversation between @nickjbarlow and @chickyog about the election lead @nickjbarlow to Tweet: "@chickyog No, but when he does, the Telegraph and Mail will *claim it's Nick Clegg's fault*." (emphasis added), this was followed shortly by a series of Tweets by @chickyog, @heavylight, @jesus_john and others which used the hashtag <#nickcleggsfault>. Its popularity increased to the point at which it became registered on Twitter's World Trends board and was used by influential Twitter users such as the political satirist Armando Iannucci, who commented that "The Nick Clegg Taking Money, Declaring It, then Handing it Back Scandal is the dullest for 50yrs. #nickcleggsfault"³⁹.

The sardonic nature of much of this commentary makes automatic analysis of the tone of these Tweets via software such as that available at <<http://pulseofthetweeters.com>> difficult (see discussion in Chapter 4). The site suggests that the hashtag was composed of 73.9% negative sentiments to 26.1% positive. However this appears to be due to the inability of the software to cope with the sarcasm inherent in the phrase itself. For example, a link on the Liberal Democrat official Twitter feed to a video by Simon Hughes which makes reference to the hashtag is rated as negative whilst both the Tweet and the video are overwhelmingly positive and supportive of the Liberal Democrats and their leader. The inclusion of the hashtag could also have potentially increased the subsequent replicator power of the Tweet and the video considered as separate memes. A more qualitative reading of the Tweets within this hashtag suggests this humorous meme was similar in tone to that of the centrally edited *mydavidcameron.com* posters, largely light-hearted and absurd rather than aggressive or negative but still not wholly positive in the manner of the memes which characterised Obama's candidacy ([Sparkes-Vian as] Vian, 2011). Like the posters, it can also be considered counter-propaganda in that it appeared in response to negative material already in the public domain, rather than replicating simply as a spontaneous endorsement of Nick Clegg and his party. The Tweets attached to the hashtag attributed various common or ridiculous hardships, both real and imaginary to the Liberal Democrat leader; for example the very first Tweet to use the hashtag was by @chickyog and read "Just stubbed my toe #nickcleggsfault", later examples include @DrSamuelJohnson who attributed to Clegg "The Predisposition of Porto-Wine to

³⁹ Information acquired using <<http://www.pulseofthetweeters.com>>.

induce diabolick [sic] Episodes of the GOUT #NickCleggsFault", and @Jimmibabe's Tweet "my 17 year old lab Carrie has just pooped on the kitchen floor, it didn't happen b4 last week it must be #nickcleggsfault". However this meme is distinct from *mydavidcameron.com* in that it is a positive endorsement of a party, as opposed to an attack (however light hearted) against a party from a coalition of their opponents. Whilst the Conservatives were fairly successful in promoting online videos via their own, centrally produced YouTube channel, the Liberal Democrats were the only party who successfully managed to inspire the kind of spontaneous, citizen produced propaganda evident in <#nickcleggsfault>. As can be seen from the Simon Hughes video, additional material could be attached to such a hashtag, aiding its proliferation outside of the virtually distributed network of the Twitter domain. The trend attached to the <#nickcleggsfault> meme can also be seen as an implicit 'copy the instructions' meme in that the hashtag itself remains consistent and the variation comes with the alteration of the specific misfortune sarcastically attributed to the Liberal Democrat leader.

I agree with Nick

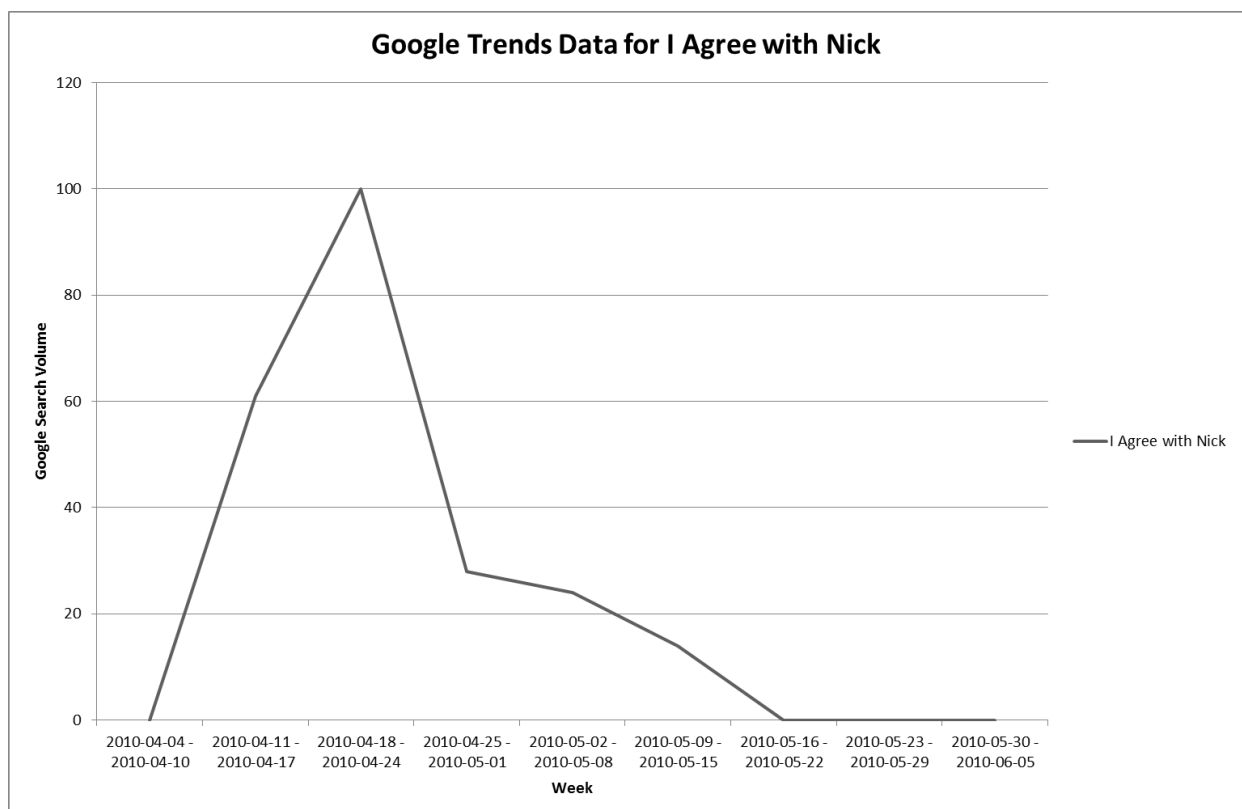


Figure 7: I Agree with Nick Google Trends Data

The Liberal Democrat capacity to inspire wider Internet memes was most evident in the best known, non-satirical meme of the campaign 'I agree with Nick'. It originated when Gordon Brown used the phrase repeatedly during the first TV debate in an attempt to imply a common ground between the

two relatively progressive parties in the face of the Conservative opposition (Coleman, 2010). Figure 14 is a crude indication of the spread of this meme over time as indicated by Google Trends⁴⁰. This takes the pop-cultural meme as the level of replication and seeks to measure it across online time and space. As with the social media data, interest here correlates with the dates of the television dates with interest beginning at a very high level (relative to total interest) during the first debate, climbing over the subsequent week, declining sharply after the second debate, bouncing back slightly for the third and then vanishing completely as the campaign drew to a close.

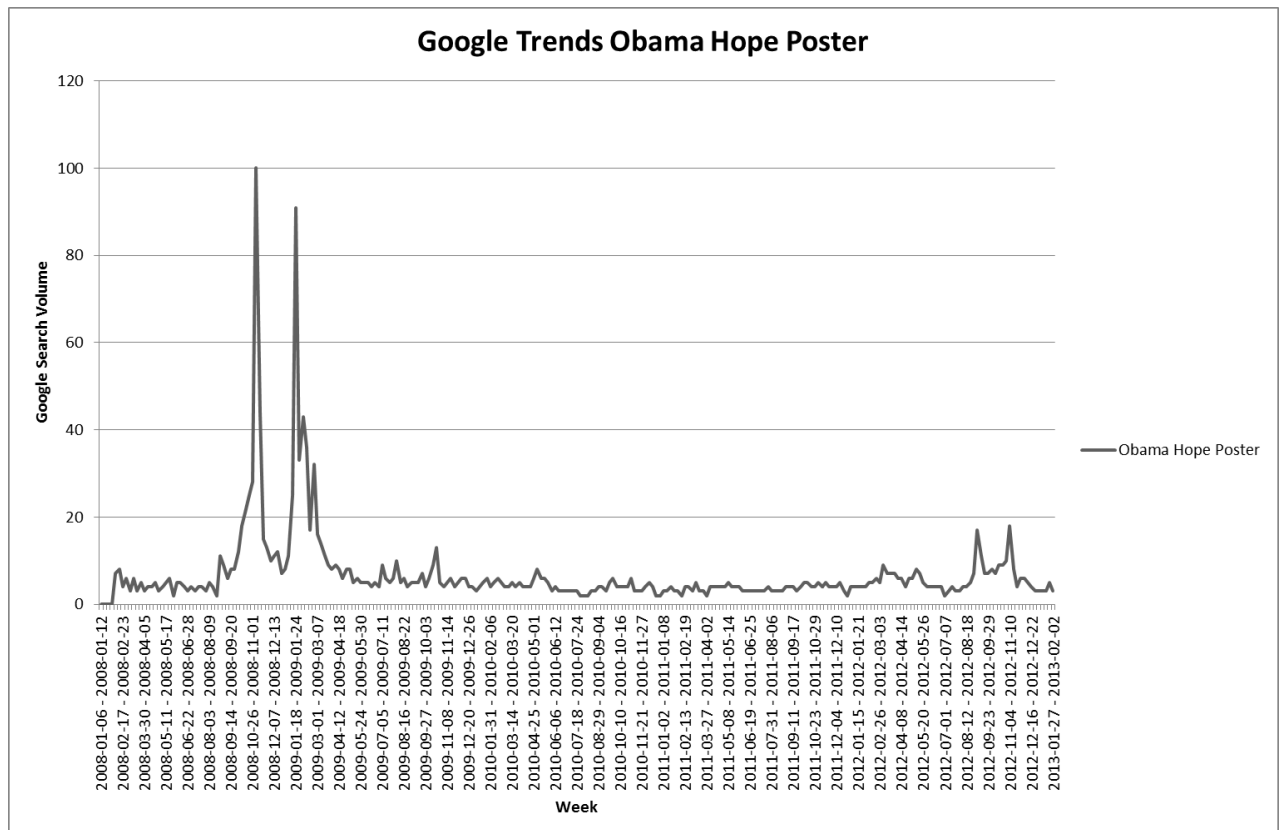


Figure 8: Obama 'Hope' Poster Google Trends Data

The majority of Internet memes which can be analysed in terms of UK electoral propaganda during this period did not produce sufficient Google search volume to produce a trendline of this nature and, in keeping with discourses of a 'non-Internet election', even this relatively popular meme was short lived and not self-sustaining. *Mydavidcameron.com* produces only a very small trendline although as the site's author points out, this may be an underestimation as a consequence of the high image to text ratio which makes the software a less than suitable popularity gauge (Singer, 2010c). Google Trends also records interest in 'I agree with Nick' to be almost exclusively from

⁴⁰ Google Trends shows the Google search volume for a given term relative to total Google searches during that period, normalised on a 1-100 scale where 100 indicates peak interest. For full data see Appendix L.

England⁴¹ to the exclusion of other regions and parts of the world; not unexpected given the relative size of the two countries but problematic when trying to assess the proliferation of propagandistic memes. When compared to a popular meme from the Obama election there is a marked difference. Whilst there are clear peaks during the election and inauguration periods (matched by much smaller peaks during the 2012 campaign) the meme itself has remained self-sustaining as a replicator with measurable popularity in both the US and UK; although, as many of its variations are entirely a-political it is not necessarily self-sustaining as propaganda for Obama. This is in keeping with the notion suggested in Chapter 4 that the alteration in an allele can alter both the meaning of a meme, and its propagandistic effects.

An examination of the various manifestations of 'I agree with Nick' indicates that this simple replicator has less inherent coherence than the more complex poster designs and therefore less capacity for variation without degradation, whilst still remaining recognisable as a copy of the original meme. In many of its iterations, 'I agree with Nick' is not a memeplex with substitutable alleles as with the *mydavidcameron.com* posters, but a 'copy the product' meme. The 'I agree with Nick' products on zazzle.com which supplemented the little available directly through the Liberal Democrat Homepage, incorporated the phrase into a variety of designs printed on key rings, t-shirts, mugs and bumper stickers. Examples include simple designs which feature the party logo and the slogan as well as more complex images such as those featuring a picture of the leader or the more ambiguous cartoon sheep - which could be simply a mascot or an implicit criticism of the sheep-like followers of a new political trend. These were later supplemented by versions in response to the subsequent coalition with the Conservatives, such as the merger with the popular 'Keep Calm and Carry On' meme - originally propaganda for the British Government during WWII - Keep Calm and Agree with Nick and Dave. In addition to the ambiguity of meaning in some of these designs, others have an explicitly anti-Clegg message such as 'I agree with Dick' and several deriding all three leaders such as 'I don't agree with Nick, or Gordy or 'call me Dave''. Both these anti-politics variations and the lacklustre replication of even the most recognisable meme of the campaign, indicate once again that the environment in which these memes replicated was not especially receptive to political memes, with complex co-creation largely reserved for the negative campaigning of *mydavidcameron.com*.

⁴¹ Note this is England specifically not the UK, the search was restricted to the UK as a global search did not provide sufficient data to produce regional information. Full figures for this trendline and for the Obama 'Hope' poster trendline are available in Appendix L.

Not so viral video

Whilst it was Labour who explicitly ran a campaign which encouraged the replication of its messages by supporters, they are conspicuously absent from the meme-pool when it comes to citizen generated propaganda, or even counter-propaganda. The later variations of 'I've never voted Tory before but...' which explicitly attacked Labour, were after all set up by the Conservative Party not members of the public (Singer, 2010b), most of whom did not appear to find Labour worthy of either horizontally organised endorsement or censure. In this field of centrally generated replicators it is the Conservatives who managed to produce the more effective memes. Their marked success on YouTube when compared to the other parties is striking, especially in comparison to Facebook and Twitter. Although the number of views of the Conservative YouTube channel increased steadily throughout the period between the first TV debate and the election (whilst their two major rivals increased only slightly), this dramatic increase was not evenly spread across the videos uploaded. Contemporary figures for individual videos are no longer available, however assuming that there has not been a dramatic alteration in the proportions of views per video - only an increase in the number of views - there are four outliers which have proved dramatically better replicators than the others on this channel.

Video ⁴²	Date	Title	Views
1	19/04/2010	<u>David Cameron: What it takes to change a country</u> (MrSmithJC, 2010) Cameron uses a similar rhetoric of 'hope' and 'change' to that of Obama combined with the Bandwagon suggestion that problems should be solved collectively by the whole nation, not by politicians.	175,750
2	24/04/2010	<u>1 minute of Labour</u> (POLITICSUK, 2012a) Recounts the increases in 'negative' things such as crime, debt and tax collected, which happen in 1 minute at the time the video was produced.	103,811
3	03/05/2010	<u>This is a historic election - together, we can bring the change Britain needs</u> (POLITICSUK1, 2012b) Similar rhetorical devices to the 19th April video with an increased focus on collective action and responsibility.	195,840
4	04/05/2010	<u>13 years of Labour</u> (POLITICSUK1, 2012c) A longer list of complaints about Labour, mostly focusing	141,958

⁴² The original videos with their associated viewing figures have been taken offline but the videos themselves have been reposted and can be accessed via <<http://www.YouTube.com>> and <<http://www.keepvid.com>>.

		on broken promises relating to sleaze and comparing their initial 1997 promises to their record in office.	
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Figure 9: WebCameron Videos Table

These videos are evenly split between a positive message of hope, change and devolution of power (videos 1 and 3) and negative adverts, focused specifically on Labour, with the Liberal Democrats referred to only implicitly, through calls for a strong, unified government (videos 2 and 4). In terms of style, the professionalism of the negative videos arguably made them television commercials distributed via a different medium, not unlike the Liberal Democrat video *Say Goodbye to Broken Promises* (Libdem, 2010a) discussed in chapter 6. There was none of the D.I.Y aesthetic associated with 'memetic' video. However, as noted by Shifman (2012) and to a lesser extent by Burgess and Green (2009), a professional style is more common amongst 'viral' videos i.e. videos that are shared and viewed widely but not re-created and thus not subject to evolutionary change. As such these videos can be seen as 'copy the product', rather than 'copy the instructions' memes. Given the nature of the evolution which the Conservative poster campaign was subject to, such replication may have been preferable to Conservative Party propagandists, even if it does suggest a shallower form of support than re-creation, in which supporters are willing to sacrifice considerably more time and energy to demonstrate their enthusiasm for a subject or support for a cause.

What is particularly striking about the language in the more positive videos from the memetic perspective is not simply the imitation of Obama's rhetorical style, but the contrast between the relatively top-down campaign approach discussed in Chapter 6, and the talk of co-creation when it comes to policy and policy implementation. This too speaks to the use of the Bandwagon propaganda technique used by Obama (see Sparkes-Vian, 2013) in which he sought to increase the enthusiasm of his support base by rhetorically devolving power too them. Cameron combined this tactic with a self-depreciation aimed at the political class which is also recognisable in his earlier speeches (Sparkes-Vian, 2013). For example he claimed that "politicians have been treating the public like mugs for about 40 years, pretending that...we the politicians have all the answers" (MrSmithJC, 2010), and that "if we want to make this big society happen, we have to give the people much, much more power" (PoliticsUK1, 2012c).

The scepticism which greeted Cameron's words notwithstanding (Sparkes-Vian, 2013), the use of such rhetoric suggests a more sophisticated appreciation of the techniques of digital propaganda on behalf of the Conservative party than is generally indicated in the literature (see Chapter 5), or by their homepage alone. However, as with Labour's 'Word of Mouth Campaign', simply following the US example is insufficient if the goal is to reap the full benefits of a successful online campaign.

Whilst the relatively high viewing figures show the Conservative's YouTube channel to be delivering better, or at least more viral memes than their competitors, the lack of corresponding citizen generated endorsements suggest that such figures are similar to the thermometer poll readings (Green, 2010): the party and its message appears to have been disliked less than their rivals, not loved more, and this is a poor ground for a successful digital campaign.

Conclusion: Fragmented convergence and a lack of replicator power

As with Chapter 6, this chapter will conclude with an evaluation of the analysis in the context of each of the three major research aims for this project.

In terms of the empirical findings, the notion of the 'non-Internet election' could be seen as at least partly sustained by the generally low rates of overall interaction on social media and the quantity and nature of generation of citizen generated propaganda. However online political interaction is not isolated in its own unique 'digital sphere', events both media based such as the leaders' debates, and part of the wider routine of the election such as polling day itself, cause convergence between media forms both old and new. This is especially true for the Liberal Democrats whose increase in popularity online correlated strongly with Nick Clegg's first appearance on the televised leaders' debates. As such the notion of the Internet/non-Internet election is challenged by a perspective which includes multiple platforms within a broader cultural and political ecology.

The 'call/response' relationship noted in the convergence between television and digital social networks was reflected within many of the pop-cultural memes analysed as well; something which has been previously noted within the literature on memetics by Shifman and Thelwall (2009). The *mydavidcameron.com* posters responded to the offline originals produced by the Conservative Party and resulted in a variety of later iterations from across the political spectrum. Similarly, <#nickcleggsfault> responded to offline negativity from within the broadcast press whilst 'I agree with Nick' began on television and subsequently spawned pro and anti-Liberal Democrat variations. The most obvious exception to this rule came with the *WebCameron* YouTube videos produced directly by the Conservative Party. To use the distinction made by Shifman (2012), these videos were more viral than memetic, in that they made reasonably good replicators, but did not result in imitation and co-creation. This confirms the argument made in chapter 6, that the Conservative campaign, whilst including some of the horizontal elements of a successful digital operation, was closer to the vertical/hierarchical end of the hybrid campaign spectrum than their more poorly funded rivals.

In terms of memetic theory, the use of the 'copy the instructions'/'copy the product' distinction and the notion of the memetic allele, were particularly applicable to the pop-cultural meme. This is useful as the distinction between the theoretical research on the academic meme and the more recent investigations into pop-cultural and Internet memes have been largely distinct without even a common definition for the meme. The notion that specific concepts advocated by traditional memeticists such as Blackmore (1999) and Distin (2005) can be applied successfully to pop-cultural memetics suggests the potential for the resurgence of this older school in the context of digital communication. In terms of propaganda theory the instances of imitation, even within a 'less than Internet' election can be seen as broadly supportive of the notion of propaganda techniques as memes and thus of propaganda as an evolutionary concept. For example the replication of the use of image macros is an example of direct imitation which emerged during the campaign itself and which provides the potential for adaptation in the context of subsequent election campaigns. However as in the previous chapter, the overwhelming conclusion based on the analysis of the pop-cultural memes and the enthusiasm with which the public greeted the parties' presence on social media, is that the environment in which these memes were replicating was one of lukewarm support and a lack of enthusiasm. This environment simply did not provide the kind of opportunities for replication with which the citizen generated memes of propaganda produced for the Obama campaign were faced and as a consequence those that did arise tended to lack replicator power.

Methodologically this chapter has continued to make use of the 'levels of replication' tool used extensively in Chapter 6, this was of particular use in analysing Twitter, as the pop-cultural level of replication (the hashtag) is distinct from the academic level, which could include both the hashtag and individual Tweets as examples of replicators. The meme's eye view was also particularly useful in terms of identifying opportunities for replication within specific social networks considered as memetic environments. However, as initially proposed in Chapter 6, this chapter has sought to expand on the meme's eye view in order to form a more comprehensive picture of the social network as a memetic environment. This includes a macro analysis in which the perspective of the meme is replaced by an analysis of the entire network and the consequences for all memes within it when universal alterations (such as the Facebook switch from 'fan' to 'like') are implemented. This broader environmental analysis will continue to be adapted throughout the rest of this case study with a view to refining it into an additional tool to be added to the methodological toolkit during the evaluation of the memetic methodology in the final chapter of this study. The continued use of the notion of the memetic vehicle as a means of analysing complex memeplexes which are nonetheless technically capable of unitary replication, suggests a cautious endorsement of the concept and utility

of the memetic vehicle as an analytical tool. Its definition is less precise than within genetic theory and the boundaries between individual memetic vehicles are more porous. However the notion of a larger memetic structure which contains and protects replicators that work to further other replicators within it and to attract additional minds to spaces where they can receive such memes, does appear to be both vindicated by this analysis and useful to the memetic evaluation of social networks. The understanding of these networks in general and Facebook in particular will be vital within the next chapter which will take a closer look at Facebook as the most popular of the Social Networking Sites within the 2010 election.

Chapter Eight: Facebook and the 2010 Election

The purpose of this chapter is to use the conceptual and methodological tools developed throughout this study to further examine the major UK political parties' use of Facebook during the 2010 election. This subject was raised in Chapter 7 during the general discussion of Social Networking Sites; however as the most popular of such sites Facebook specifically deserves special attention. According to Meikle and Young users in the UK “spend more than five times as much time on Facebook as the do on any other site” (2012:63), it is also a multimedia platform with the capacity to embed and link to videos, to post longer text based memes than can be contained within a Tweet and to post images such as the posters from *mydavidcameron.com* or photos from the campaign trail. It has a high level of user interaction which allows for a greater focus on the digital supporter base and the relationship between party and citizen than has been possible in previous chapters. In addition, the ability to share complex information also provides the potential for the successful replication of coherent pop-cultural memes such as those examined in Chapter 7.

This chapter is based on data posted to the Facebook timelines of the three major UK parties from March - May 2010 (full data is available in Appendices I and J). The first section of this chapter examines the direction of communication on those walls in light of the notions of co-creation and crowd sourcing which are crucial to the ‘copy-me’ dynamic of digital propaganda. Methodologically this section will also seek to build on the notion of a broader environmental analytical tool to complement the ‘meme’s eye view’ approach. The second section will further the discussion of convergence begun in Chapter 7 through a more detailed analysis of the relationship between the leaders’ debates and the party/citizen reactions to them taking place on Facebook. The third section will examine pop-cultural and academic memes within the Facebook wall as a memetic environment, addressing the relationship between the propagation of ideological and policy memes and the production of party and citizen generated propaganda. The final section will expand on the idea of environmental selection within the Facebook wall by addressing the issues of ‘trolling’ and ‘flaming’. The attempt to derail debate and discussion through the posting of aggressive and hostile comments was a problem for all parties and appears to have resulted in censorship by moderators; thus providing an opportunity to explore the relationship between propaganda and censorship within memetic theory.

Posts over time

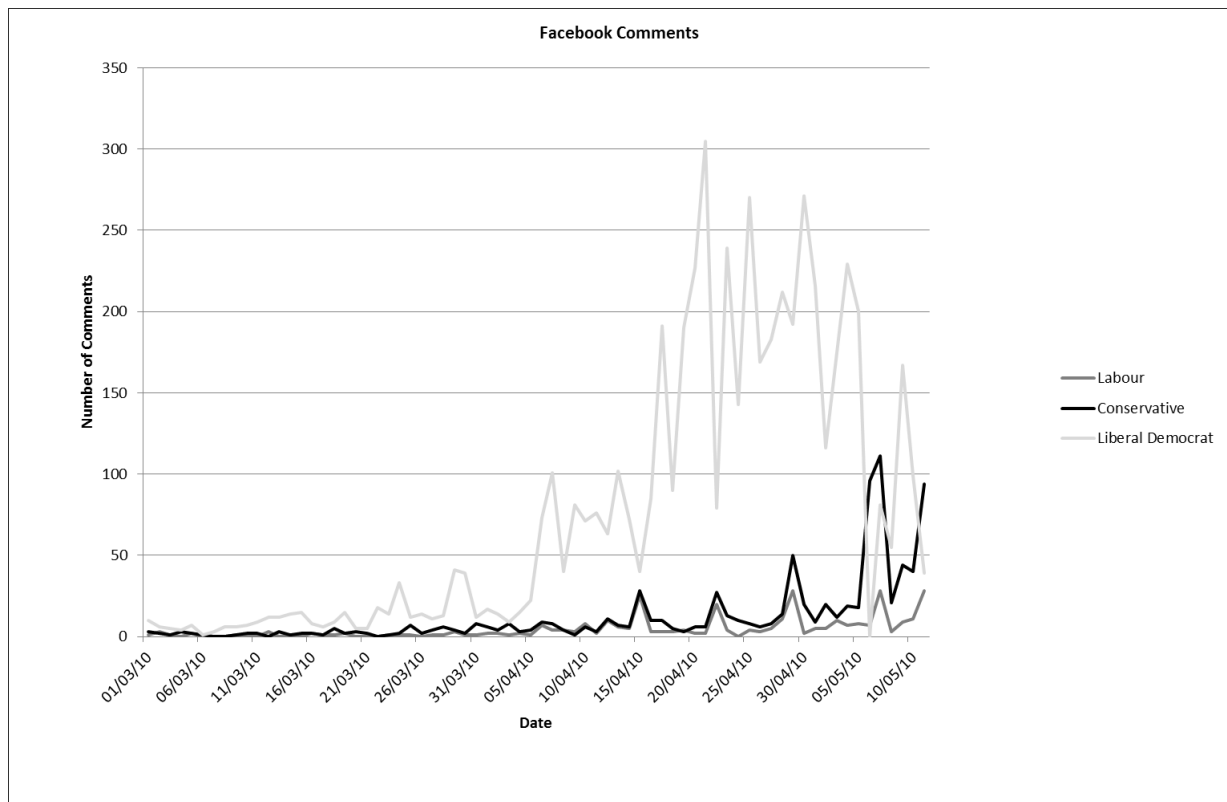


Figure 10: Facebook Comments Time Series Data

The previous chapter used time series data on the 'fan'/'like' interactions with party Facebook pages to build up a picture of the Facebook network as a memetic environment in which party memes were replicating. From the meme's eye view, the more subscribers a page has, the more opportunities for replication as posts are copied into a person's newsfeed and potentially 'liked' or commented upon - actions which will further increase their replicator power throughout the network. In keeping with the intention to go beyond the meme's eye view and develop a broader analysis of the memetic environment, this chapter will look at the interactions on the Facebook page itself as indicative of the qualitative nature of memetic replication within the party page as an environment with (quasi) vehicle status. Specifically this analysis will focus on the issue of passive/active interaction which is of particular importance to the production of a successful digital campaign which relies on a sustained level of active support (see Chapter 3). Methodologically this is also a matter of altering the level of replication addressed within the analysis, as previously the focus was on the number of avenues for replication as indicated by subscriber numbers, whereas here the focus is on the replicator power of the Facebook posts themselves.

The time series data for the number of Facebook subscribers discussed in Chapter 7, showed the Conservatives building upon a high level of initial popularity with Labour increasing steadily but with

much lower levels of subscription throughout the campaign, whilst the Liberal Democrats experienced a massive increase in subscriber numbers in correlation with the rise of 'Cleggmania' after the first leaders' debate. By measuring and categorising the number of posts rather than the number of subscribers, this picture can be expanded to illuminate the extent to which these increases in interest represented passive replication of party memes or active interaction.

The posts on Facebook timeline from March 1st 2010 to 11th May when the coalition was formed show that there were 326 separate posts on the Labour Party timeline and a combined total of 47,126 likes and comments.⁴³ The Conservative Party boasted considerably more interaction with 868 separate posts with 79,452 combined likes and comments. The Liberal Democrats however, whilst only obtaining marginally more subscribers than the Conservatives even at the height of the unusually high levels of interest in the third party, had many times the quantity of activity on their page with 5,391 posts during the same period. The number of likes and comments however was lower than both of their rivals at 37,047. This could suggest a more 'bottom up' culture in which Liberal Democrat posters are more likely to contribute their own ideas rather than simply respond to others, however it could also indicate a more superficial culture in which posts are limited to one off declarations of support or detraction with little in depth debate (these issues will be addressed in detail in later sections). It could also be a consequence of data corruption as the Liberal Democrat sample included both anomalous results and issues with the raw information. Specifically the removal of the capacity to comment which deleted historical posts from the live timeline during the data collection period; the Liberal Democrat new media team indicated that this decision was the combined result of trolling and insufficient personnel to administer and moderate the page (Lockwood, 2011)⁴⁴.

The reasoning behind this later decision may also shed light on the anomalies which appear in the time series data for the rate of posting on the Liberal Democrat wall, a matter which in turn can help us better understand the nature of the party Facebook wall as a memetic environment. The rate of activity on the Labour and Conservative walls is essentially an exaggerated version of the rate of subscribers to their page with one specific difference. In addition the convergence around key election dates there was a marked convergence around the leaders' debates; in the data on total page likes there was a substantial increase in interaction with the Liberal Democrat page after the first debate but the rest of the data showed little obvious correlation with these events. It appears that as these significant, national media events took place, people logged on to Facebook to comment on and discuss them, providing additional support for the argument that they were not

⁴³ See Appendices I and J.

⁴⁴ This issue is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

simply 'TV' debates, but existed as events within a wider media ecology. It is also notable that the Conservatives, who dominated in terms of the number of 'fans' and 'likes' their page received, stayed only marginally ahead of Labour in terms of the rate of page interaction and for periods was substantially behind the Liberal Democrats. Even within a medium with such a high potential for horizontal communication the Conservatives remained at the hierarchical end of the hybrid communication spectrum.

The Liberal Democrat data is by contrast highly erratic, with large peaks directly before and after major events and low troughs correlating directly with them. Most dramatically there was not a single remaining post on the Liberal Democrat wall on polling day, with the dates of the TV debates and the coalition formation also conspicuously low. Assuming that the dates and times recorded by Facebook for each post are accurate, this suggests that either people were not posting on Facebook during this time – perhaps preferring to use the Liberal Democrat internal social network or interacting offline – or that there are a substantial quantity of missing posts. There are indications that some of the reduction in the volume of posts was due to technical problems on the site. For example Helen Pollock posted “fb gone screwy again. I can only get posts from 3 hours ago.” On April 29th, and Dee Young posted “aaaaaaaaaaaaarrrrggggghhhh! FB is driving me crazy! If it doesn't sort itself out in 5mins then i'm off to bed!” on April 30th. However on each of these occasions some posts were getting through and people were able to report the problem. The complete absence of any posts on May 5th or any subsequent posts complaining about problems with the site, suggests this was not the only factor in reducing audience interaction with the page. The indication of difficulties with moderation in later years suggests the possibility that an inability to moderate their wall effectively may have resulted in an indiscriminate removal policy, in which party moderators deleted large numbers of posts from the wall on mass. A dramatic, but less extreme measure than the ultimate decision to close down this form of interaction completely. From the broader environmental perspective the moderation of individual pages represents a selection pressure, comparable to, but distinct from the hierarchical control possessed by Facebook as a whole. Theoretically, whilst a moderator cannot alter the rules of replication within the network (e.g. the relationship between a post's replication and it being 'liked' or commented upon) they can implement an editorial selection pressure⁴⁵ throughout the page as a memetic environment. From the meme's eye view this means more opportunities for replication for those memes which conform to the rules as interpreted by the moderators. However in the case of the Liberal Democrats it

⁴⁵ Labour and the Liberal Democrats had accessible rules of conduct initially available via the Facebook sub-corpus which were later rendered inaccessible due to the file corruption discussed in Chapter 4. The Conservatives did not produce an equivalent which could be accessed in this manner although discussions with their media staff suggested that they simply followed Facebook's own terms and conditions (Priest, 2012).

appears that a combination of high volume of posts and technical issues resulted in a universal repression of post replication, the selection pressure of moderation was no longer acting in the interests of the Liberal Democrat Party as the memeplex/vehicle which ostensibly controlled the page. This issue will be addressed further in the later section on ‘trolling’ and ‘flaming’.

Communication direction

The issue of communication direction raised when discussing the Conservative page can be further explored by examining the relative number of posts by citizens (a category which may include minor politicians such as local councillors) and the party itself (a number which includes party leaders and posts from the official party Facebook pages). The category ‘Other’ includes spam from companies seeking to advertise on the page, as well as electorally relevant posts by third party organisations such as Democracy UK – a non-partisan page which also hosted the UK digital debates and promoted engagement with the election by posting links to polling data and news material relevant to the election (ukelection, 2010).

	Lab	Con	Lib Dem
Party	125	149	216
Public	180	699	5054
Other	21	20	5

Figure 11: Table of Data for Facebook Ratios

The distribution of posts is clearly much more in favour of posts by citizens on the Conservative and especially the Liberal Democrat walls, suggesting a more complex picture than the simple ‘top-down Tories’ model which has been suggested both by the literature (e.g. Williamson et al., 2010) and previous evidence within this study

The Conservatives in fact had a reasonably high level of independent engagement on their page, especially considering that their voters tend to be older (Ipsos MORI, 2010), and thus less likely to use social media (Brenner, 2013). The greater interaction in their page when compared to Labour should be expected given their larger subscriber base which far outstripped Labour throughout the whole election. From the meme's eye view the Conservative emissary memes were replicating further throughout the Facebook network providing links to the Conservative page and thus drawing in minds and increasing the replicator power of the posts within the page. This is before accounting for the hindrance to the replication of Labour memes brought on by the party (and in particular Gordon Brown's) poor public image, which arguably constituted a disadvantage in terms of

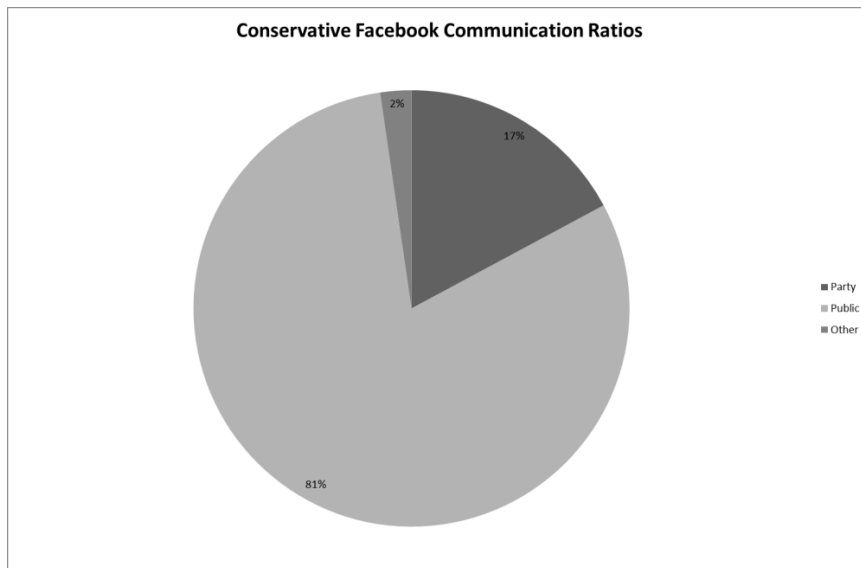


Figure 12: Conservative Facebook Ratios

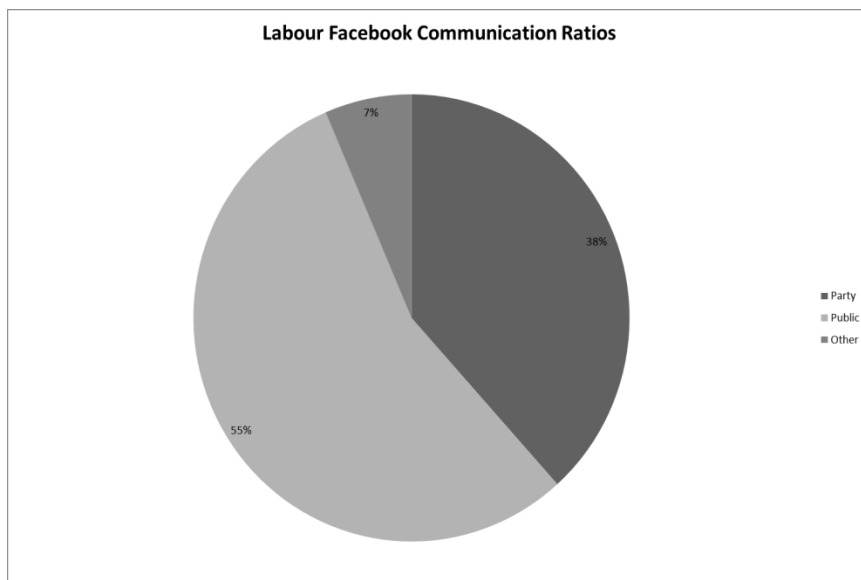


Figure 13: Labour Facebook Ratios

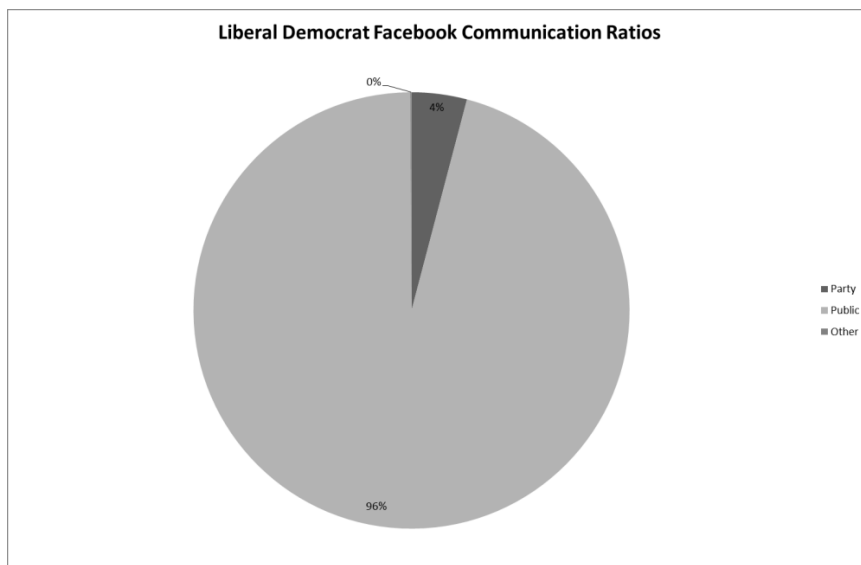


Figure 14: Liberal Democrat Facebook Ratios

differential replication (see Chapter 5 for discussion of polling data). The more comparable number of page likes/fans the Conservatives shared with the Liberal Democrats indicates that a large number of those receiving Conservative memes chose to absorb them without posting on the wall. The dominance of the Liberal Democrats in this respect is in one sense unsurprising, given that they explicitly courted the youth vote with their infamously broken promise of opposition to any rise in university tuition fees (Dommett, 2013). As indicated in Chapter 5, the Liberal Democrats also favoured a digitally focused campaign strategy, in part due to their relative lack of finance, whilst the Conservatives saw the platform as only one of many approaches they would take during the 2010 election. These figures suggest that of the three parties the Liberal Democrats appear to have had greater access to the most crucial resource for a digital campaign, enthusiastic online support, but understanding that resource requires a more extensive analysis in order to appreciate how enthusiastic those supporters were.

One way to measure the enthusiasm of a party's online support base is to examine the number of individual citizens who posted on each party wall and the frequency of posts per individual. This will give an indication first of the breadth of support and the extent to which parties' were able to attract a 'hard core' of supporters who repeatedly returned to post throughout the campaign. From the meme's eye view, the minds of these supporters can be seen as a greater than average opportunity for replication because they are already dominated by memes which resonate with memes produced by the party. If the wider environmental methodological tool is used to analyse this process, the Facebook data can be viewed from the perspective of the party and its campaign as memetic vehicles. From this standpoint, supporter's minds are a valuable resource, in that they may be sufficiently hospitable to repeatedly expend time and energy creating further party memes and engage in brand co-creation. Provided that the majority are not posting adversarial comments (as discussed in the later section on trolling) these are the supporters which are most ripe for conversion in to activists.

Labour attracted posts from 73 individual citizens (excluding party posts and posts by organisations) most of which contributed only shallow interactions, 47 of the 73 people who posted on their page posted only one comment with a maximum of 16 posts by Matt Hockin, whose posts were vociferously anti-Brown and anti-Labour. The vast majority, 68 out of 73 of the individual posters posted fewer than 10 times throughout the entire campaign. This underlines the difficulties Labour faced when attempting to engage in the established 'US-model' digital campaign. The initial formation of the 'playbook' for digital propaganda came about as a consequence of the Dean campaign's unusually distributed resources (see Trippi, 2004). They had little of the classic

advantages such as money or political profile but they did have a much larger than average online following, drawn to Dean because of his principled stand against the war in Iraq. Labour were, like Dean, low in the polls when compared to their rivals, but this data confirms once again the absence of that resource which made Dean's campaign suitable for a 'copy me' style digital campaign: enthusiastic and dedicated supporters, willing to organise themselves relatively autonomously (the level of co-ordinated, central control would increase with Obama but still relied on a hierarchy of volunteers (Plouffe, 2009)).

With less than a hundred people willing to even proclaim their allegiance through posting (although almost 300,000 people engaged in more passive support by 'liking' the page – see Appendix F), much less organise in Labour's support, the party's 'word of mouth' memes had very little capacity to replicate within this crucial digital network, despite the effective replication of the 'copy me' techniques learned in the USA. The lack of horizontal communication also undermines the potential of Facebook as a space in which supporters can re-enforce their political views, driving out individuals who might want to spread hostile memes and creating selection pressure for pro-Labour memes and the individuals who wish to replicate them. This suggests that whilst there may be some analytical advantages to treating the party Facebook page as a memetic vehicle - in particular due to the relationship between the vehicle and the emissary meme discussed in Chapter 6 - the Labour page was in fact rather poor at protecting its internal replicators from other hostile memes.

The largest producer of memes on Labour's wall was the party itself and by a considerable margin (125 for Labour, 17 for Democracy UK, 16 for Matt Hockin) meaning that communication on behalf of their supporters was reactive, thus arguably making communication on the wall more vertical than horizontal. However there was considerable interaction with the posts which were present; there were 24,564 likes and 22,562 comments of which 33,818 (71.76% divided 18,793 likes to 15,025 comments) were direct responses to posts by the party. This suggests that whilst Labour's page may not have been hugely effective as a forum for discussion and organisation, it did act as a vehicle to a certain extent, in that it facilitated the replication of some of Labour's memes. The distribution of likes versus comments is also fairly even, although slightly skewed in the direction of likes which as previously observed in Chapter 7, can be seen as a 'lighter-weight' action. This suggests a less casual, 'slactivist' attitude on behalf of those interacting with those posts when compared to the other parties, an observation which stands in opposition to the high proportion of single posters amongst those who chose to comment directly on the wall.

The Conservative Party enjoyed a greater number of individual posters with 152 citizens contributing directly to their wall. However the proportion of those posting only single comments was marginally

higher than Labour's at 103, this is 67.76% of those contributing posts in comparison to 64.38% for Labour. This superficiality of engagement was typical of all parties, with over 90% of those who posted contributing between 1 and 10 times over the course of the two and a half month sample period. The following histograms show the frequency of posts for all parties clustered firmly in the lower quartile and the median average⁴⁶ of posts for each of the parties was 1.

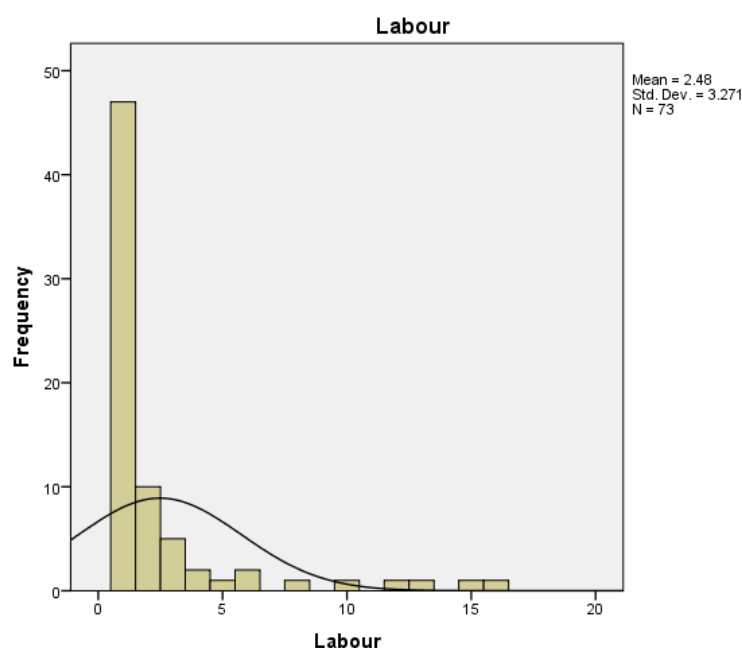


Figure 15: Labour Comment Frequency Histogram⁴⁷

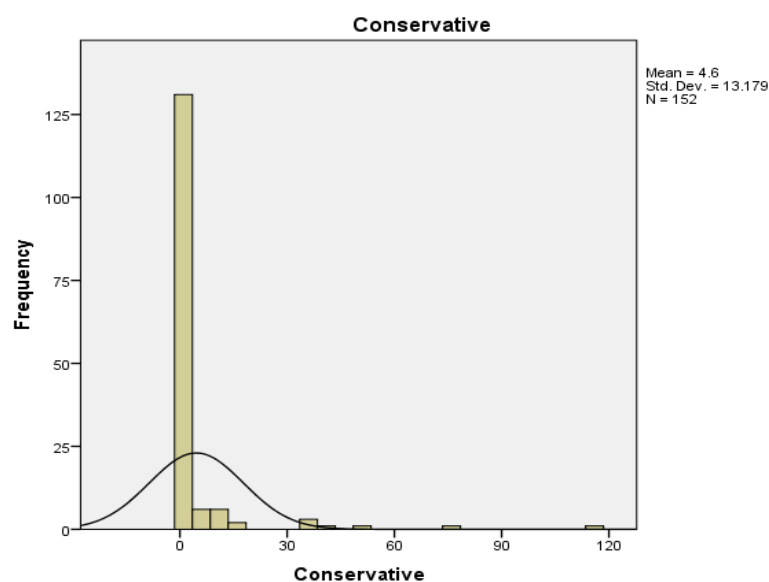


Figure 16: Conservatives Comment Frequency Histogram

⁴⁶ This is the correct average for non-parametric data. The lack of normal distribution is indicated in Figures 22-24 by the normal distribution curve.

⁴⁷ Charts and averages calculated using the statistical analysis software SPSS.

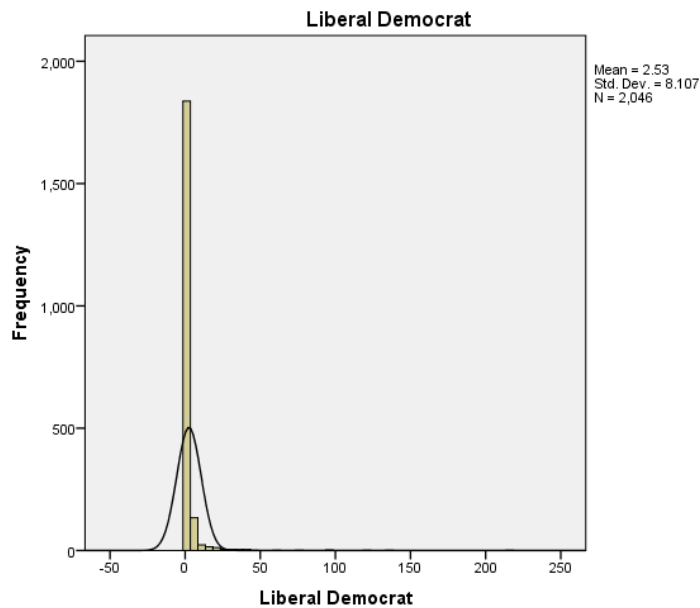


Figure 17: Liberal Democrats Comment Frequency Histogram

The Conservatives actually did better in percentage terms in gathering a more dedicated support base than either of the other parties with 15 individuals (9.87%) posting more than 10 times, at least when compared to the 4 dedicated multi-posters on Labour's page, the most prolific of whom was not even a supporter; however in terms of absolute numbers none of the parties attracted a very large number of dedicated supporters to their Facebook page. In contrast to Labour the most prolific poster on the Conservative wall was Matt Davies who consistently posted comments praising Conservative policy, repeating familiar rhetorical narratives from the right wing press, such as expressing indiscriminate anger towards all benefit claimants, referring to them as "workshy" (May 8th) and "scum" (6th May and 9th May)⁴⁸, as well as levelling often quite aggressive criticism at Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The qualitative nature of these contributions will be discussed in more detail in the section on 'trolling' and 'flaming', the significance here is that despite being marginally more successful than Labour, the Conservatives too failed to engage substantial numbers of supporters who were willing to continually return to their page and use it as a forum for discussion and organisation. The interaction in response to posts was somewhat more reactive than Labour's. Of the 79,452 interactions recorded (54,259 likes, 25,190 comments 2 shares) 67,462 (84.91%) were responses to posts by the Conservative Party. Overall the ratio of likes to comments was 68.29% likes to only 31.70% comments, with the specific responses to the Conservative Party posts divided up even more strongly in favour of likes, with 75.36% of the interactions being a simple endorsement whilst only 24.64% chose to comment. As with Labour, the posts by the Conservatives

⁴⁸ Note, at no point is there any indication in any of Matt Davies' posts that this hostility is restricted to those fraudulently claiming benefit. The overall impression left by his comments is that he considers all benefit claims to be illegitimate and facilitated by Labour welfare policies.

are proving fairly effective replicators despite a general lack of interest in the wall itself. However there is also the implication that the greater levels of interaction with the Conservative posts are more superficial than their rivals' as the majority represent simple affirmations rather than more complex commentary. From the meme's eye view this still suggests that the page is attracting enough people to provide memes of Conservative party propaganda with opportunities for replication throughout the network. However additional memes of citizen generated propaganda created by those supporters do not appear to be in evidence in any real quantity and the individual posts on the page by supporters did not make for particularly effective replicators.

The Liberal Democrat interactions are, like much of the third party's data from this election, unusual. The sheer number of comments dwarfs those on the other parties' walls even without accounting for the apparent removal of significant numbers of comments by moderators. In total there were 2,046 individual citizens posting on their wall, the majority 'single' posters at 71.51% and the highest proportion in the 1-10 comment range at 97.07%. Due to the data collection issues already discussed there is no individual data available for likes and comments. However the combined total is very low when compared to the other parties' with only 30,224 reactive interactions, with an approximate division of 53.87% likes to 46.13% comments based on the available data (this accounts for 30,440 (82.12%) of the total number of likes and comments). The percentage figures could suggest a very large number of essentially superficial interactions, with lots of single posts and fewer comments responding to posts suggesting a lack of sustained, horizontal communication. However the sheer number of posts when compared to their electoral rivals may conceal a more complex picture and the fairly balanced estimations of likes and comments suggests these too were reasonably interactive. Whilst a substantial majority of the Liberal Democrat wall posts came from those who posted 10 times or less, there were 60 individual posters who contributed more than 10 posts throughout the campaign, compared to 4 for Labour and 15 for the Conservatives. The most prolific of these was Nathanael Williams who is distinctive in that at 215 comments, he posted more frequently than the party itself. The nature of his comments was also divergent from the more prolific posters on both Labour's page, in that he was consistently supportive of the Liberal Democrats, and the Conservatives in that the tone of his posts tended to be thoughtful and articulate, avoiding the ad homonym attacks which often appeared in Matt Davies' contributions. For example on April 21st Nathaniel Williams posted:

The Conservative Party's new European partners in Poland must be exposed as they have thrown a spotlight on the rise of racist extremism in the east. Additionally In Polish schools, "unpatriotic" authors, and books by Goethe, Kafka and Dostoevsky, have been removed from children's reading lists as part of an attempt at the "purification of Polish culture". Science lessons have taught that

Darwinism is "a literary fiction". Another crude fantasy propagated by Law and Justice - that the Solidarity leader Lech Walesa conspired with rather than helped defeat communism in Poland - demonstrates how little truth matters to its leaders. Once again their judgement must be called into question.

In addition, whilst the Labour and Conservative likes and comments were very heavily focused on the messages from their party, only 30.70% of the interactions on the Liberal Democrat page were responses to official posts. The rest represent further horizontal communication between individual citizens. Memetically the posts distributed by the party can be seen as worse replicators when compared to the Conservatives – arguably their higher number of page subscribers may have given them some advantages over Labour - but the environment of the wall appears to have been better at attracting individuals with a strong enough interest in the party to post on it, including those who returned frequently with additional contributions. The emissary memes replicating on behalf of the party seem to have been more successful in drawing in minds willing to engage with the page, rather than passively follow it.

Whilst this quantitative analysis is useful as a means of comparison between the three parties, the tendency within quantitative methodologies to ignore outliers, which can distort the capacity of mathematical models to predict future events, necessitates a more qualitative approach if these numbers are to be interpreted in the context of Facebook as a memetic environment. For example, the Liberal Democrat data shows a very high proportion of single posters within this sample as well as having a much higher number of repeat posters. The volume of casual interactions (posts by those who did not return to post again) renders the presence of posters like Nathaniel Williams invisible to a statistical analysis. However, in the context of the Facebook network as a memetic environment, the presence of such posters is highly relevant. Their messages form links to their own personal friendship networks with repeated posts increasing the exposure of people on those networks to emissary memes for the Liberal Democrat party. They also form a significant selection pressure within the page itself, although as will be seen in the analysis of 'flaming' and 'trolling', such pressures are not always positive in terms of the free exchange of political ideas.

It has already been suggested in Chapter 7 that the Facebook wall can be analysed as a memetic vehicle, although as noted in Chapter 6 it is less effective as a protector of its internal replicators than the more closely controlled party homepage. Whilst Facebook and the Party co-ordinating the page do have some hierarchical control over posts, it is less centrally co-ordinated than a homepage, the quantity and nature of content is more dependent on the wider political environment as experienced by users of Facebook. The quantitative analysis of these pages confirms the previously

observed difficulties Labour had in attracting and engaging public support, the very resource on which the Word of Mouth campaign relied is manifestly absent in this most crucial social networking site. Whilst there is a certain amount of reactive interaction and their central posts appear to have made reasonably good replicators via the 'like' and 'comment' functions, the almost complete absence of sustained, supportive interaction between individual citizens on their page hinders the 'Bandwagon' potential of the successful digital campaign.

The Conservatives were reasonably successful at using Facebook as a communications tool but only marginally more successful than Labour in terms of using it to promote horizontal communication between supporters. The interactions with the Conservative's posts made them amongst the most successful replicators but in a manner which made it clear that it was replication, not interaction that the party inspired. Memetically the memes produced by the party were being treated as 'copy the product' memes, even if they could theoretically have been disaggregated into constituent alleles and recreated. The Liberal Democrats appears to have experienced the opposite problem – although repeated issues with the data should make any conclusions here cautious ones. The wall itself proved a popular place to discuss and comment upon issues relating to the election and to organise supportive actions for the Party. Whilst the majority of these interactions were one off and thus suggest superficial support, the huge numbers of individual posters included a larger total number of frequent posters than the other two parties – the kind of digital support base on which a successful campaign could be built. However the posts by the party (even including the occasional contributions from the leader) did not receive the volume of likes and comments which might be expected given the high proportions elicited by the other parties. This hints at a greater level of horizontal communication but a lack of the central management needed to convert the support it represented into focused, coordinated action. This is the kind of selection pressure that successful editorial/moderation control can theoretically provide. Even taking the higher volume of interactions on the Liberal Democrat page into account, the analysis in this section has been fundamentally one of differential replication. From the meme's eye view, success is determined not by ever expanding replication but by out competing replicators which are also vying for the same resource, in this case the minds of the UK electorate. The replicator power of memes and pages was not equal and therefore it is possible to make judgements about which party did 'better' at creating Facebook replicators, however the levels of interaction with all pages were tiny when compared either to the total electorate which stood at 46,967,584 as of December 2010 (Office of National Statistics, 2011) or passive interaction via broadcast media, as discussed in connection with the televised leaders' debates in Chapter 5 (Wring and Ward, 2010b).

The leaders' debates

This section will continue to develop the notion of a methodological tool, distinct from the meme's eye view, which seeks to understand the nature of the environment in which memes are replicating. It is also of theoretical importance to address the leaders' debates as discussed on Facebook because of the possibility that the increase in activity at these times is the result of convergent evolution or what Conte (2000) called the 'party-shower' effect (see discussion in Chapter 7). The intention will be to demonstrate that a memetic analysis of communication can be useful even in situations where imitative communication is not the primary explanation for a specific phenomenon (in this case the increase in Facebook communication surrounding the leaders' debates). The rate of Facebook engagement throughout the election consistently shows a correlation between the TV debates and Facebook interaction. Such convergence undermines the simplistic notion of the debates as a 'television event' especially given the distribution of the debates themselves through YouTube and BBC iPlayer. However a closer examination of the content of those Facebook interactions shows them to be largely superficial and often highly negative. Negative campaigning has often been the cause of criticism; specifically allegations that it cheapens the democratic process, undermines serious debate and discourages voter participation (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995, Pratkanis and Aronson, 1991, McNair, 2007). However this study shows that the public (at least as far as can be ascertained by examining party Facebook pages) was also prone to negativity in political communication; in fact the level of debate online often sunk much lower than a traditional electoral smear campaign, with comments such as "Gordon is such a twat what a knob !!!" (Aaran Bellman, Conservative Page, 29th April) and

On one of the main roads near my house, There's a Billboard 'Vote For Change..Vote Conservative'
And some LEGEND has carefully spray painted CUNT across David Camerons forehead :) PRICELESS!!!
X (Sinéad Marie Stampe, Liberal Democrat Page, April 16th).

These are amongst the more visceral responses but are far from a-typical of posts responding to the TV debates. The emotionally charged, highly partisan tone in evidence here does not lend itself to serious political debate and appears to lend some credibility to this comment by Richard Alderton at the beginning of the campaign:

I just don't think Facebook is the tool to gain a credible electorate [sic] following, there's too many trouble makers that sabotage any sensible debate. Many people dismay at the disconnect between the younger generation and the democratic process, but online anonymous squabbling isn't the solution. If this page were "mediated" then i think it would be far more effective, the trouble is I don't think anyone is listening. Childish insults, stupid pseudonyms and poorly thought out arguments puts

politics back in the playground, the trouble is that both parliament and no.10 seem stuck there also...
(Conservative Page, March 4th)

However, whilst it is easy to dismiss some of the responses to the debates as 'childish insults' they do once again underline the public hostility towards the political classes which pervaded the environment in which campaign memes had to replicate; a sentiment which is also present in Alderton's more thoughtful contribution. From the meme's eye view, posts expressing such statements resonated with a substantial proportion of the electorate and thus found opportunities for replication. What is surprising in the context of the party Facebook pages is that such hostile memes did not meet more substantial barriers to replication from moderators, especially on the Labour and Conservative pages where those in charge do not appear to have been so overwhelmed by the sheer volume of public contributions.

There is a question as to whether the kind of spontaneous outbursts of anger towards the party leaders – especially those which were specifically in response to the TV debates can be seen as either propaganda or counter-propaganda (a reaction to or subversion of the propaganda of others) beyond the general replication of emissary memes, drawing people into the party page, which comes as a contextual consequence of all interaction with it. The use of profanity as in the above examples or violent imagery such as "I hate nick clegg. I want to hurt him :P" (Charlie Bradley, Conservative Page, 29th April) can be seen as rhetorical which is a technique O'Shaughnessy (2004) uses to define propaganda. They do also spread a message about the leader – in this case a negative one – comparable to the simplistic endorsements which also replicated on each of the pages. For example: "David Cameron for Prime Minister!" (James Blackwell, Conservative Page, 22nd April), "Nick Clegg is the man!" (Marika Reed, Liberal Democrats Page, 16th April) and "i love labour, i hate tories, i hate cameron, don't mind clegg, love brown" (Andy 'Scholes' Leyden, Labour Page, 29th April). However, whilst this digital equivalent of George Orwell's 'four legs good, two legs bad' may have a place within a digital propaganda campaign, it is arguably a less effective use of the medium than more complex, targeted, counter-propaganda. This latter technique was represented on all three pages, stemming both from the parties themselves and from the citizens who supported them.

In keeping with Labour's replication of established US techniques for digital campaigning, the party produced a branded series of responses to the debate, distributed in real time and aimed at countermanding claims made about their policies by the other leaders in debate, as well as attacking the policies of their rivals (Plouffe, 2009 discussed this in reference to Obama). The 'For the Record' alerts used a combination of text, images and hyperlinks to expand on subjects raised in the debates, these included their own policies such as banking reform, jobs and housing as well as criticisms of

'Tory cuts' (April 29th) and 'Lib Dem plans on immigration' (April 29th). Unlike the simple endorsements and insults which made up much of the citizen response, these posts proved reasonably effective as replicators with a combined average of 122 likes and comments per post⁴⁹. This is interesting in that the strict formulation of these memes, which used the same combination of title, text and image, contained easily decoded substitutable alleles, but were replicated in this instance as 'copy the product' memes, rather than showing any instance of substitution. Labour also provided links to the 'Leaders [sic] Debate Dashboard' which connected to their website and promised "live reaction[s] from Labour's politicians and bloggers" (Labour Page, 22nd April), this use of cross platform emissary memes was most prolific on the Labour page although the Conservatives did also link to David Cameron's personal profile. Whilst there was some enthusiasm in terms of direct interaction with official posts from the party, there was much less in terms of citizen generated propaganda. In keeping with the pattern established by the wider replication of Internet memes discussed in Chapter 7, there were no obvious pop-cultural memes repeated by Labour's supporters during this period. There was also very little in the way of self-organisation amongst the citizen posters to spread Labour's message, despite the party's campaign slogan which characterised 2010 as the 'word of mouth' election.

The Conservatives used a similar tactic to Labour in that the party responded directly to the TV debates with a series of branded responses. However, thanks to the relative popularity of their leader these were specifically linked to David Cameron's page and thus encompassed within the leader's brand. From the meme's eye view both the leaders' debates and the Conservative leader himself can be seen as a means to increase replicator power. As discussed in Chapter 5, the debates attracted considerable public interest and Cameron remained relatively popular when compared to the other party leaders (even at the height of 'Cleggmania' the Liberal Democrat leader never overtook him); as a consequence attaching 'the debates' or 'Cameron' as constituent alleles, can be seen as a good trick for furthering a meme's replication. However this technique was only instigated on the Conservative Facebook page in the final debate, with previous debates limited to simple commentary such as: "In tonight's TV debate, David Cameron looked ready to lead. He was personal, direct and in command" (Conservative Page, April 15th), this following a debate Cameron was widely agreed to have lost to Nick Clegg (Allen et al., 2011). There were more responsive posts following the second debate – mostly linking to poll results indicating Cameron's victory. However these were post-debate responses such as this, posted on the evening of the second debate "YouGov poll results: "Who do you think performed best overall in tonight's debate?" David Cameron 36%, Nick

⁴⁹ See Appendices I and J.

Clegg 32%, Gordon Brown 29% (22nd April)" and "in last night's TV debate, Gordon Brown claimed he didn't authorise Labour's scare tactics - but his own ministers used these leaflets..." (23rd April).

The posts during the debates themselves were mostly supportive posts from citizens but the only obviously successful replicator amongst them was "Clegg wants change only problem is you vote for him and you get brown" (Matt Davies, 22nd April). This is a variation on the 'vote x get y' meme which has appeared in various guises including examples such as 'Vote Blue go Green' discussed in Chapter 6, which had a more positive message. The simple formulation and substitutable alleles are not only attributes of an effective replicator but specifically attributes of a 'copy the instructions' meme with the addition of the propaganda technique 'paired contrast' observed by Atkinson (1984) in his study of political speechmaking. As with Labour there was little in the way of organisation amongst the citizen posters, limiting the citizen generated element of the reactive propaganda to simple endorsements of Cameron's bid for office.

The Liberal Democrat party mirrored the Conservative pattern in terms of the posts they put out in reaction to the TV debates, although they were if anything even less responsive to the first two programs. Apart from this post prior to the first debate "Nick Clegg: Just having a first look at the studio for this evening's debate. Nervous and excited? Absolutely" (April 15th). There was very little from the party itself in relation to the first two debates aside from reminders to watch them and some subsequent links to online copies of the broadcasts, a type of emissary meme common to all three parties but possibly in the context of the first debate, most beneficial to the Liberal Democrats. This was remedied during the last debate with frequent 'Leaders' Debate Updates' which, like the Conservative variant, sought to capitalise on the popularity of their leader. As with the Conservatives, including references to their popular leader can be seen as a 'good trick' for increasing replicator power, however unlike the Tories, the Liberal Democrats simply repeated their leaders name in each post, rather than linking each comment to Clegg's Facebook page. This meant the posts were less effective as emissary memes for the leader's brand than those deployed by their rivals:

LEADERS' DEBATE UPDATE: We are the only party in this election with a fully costed plan to get people off benefits says Nick Clegg

LEADERS' DEBATE UPDATE: I will work tirelessly to deliver fairness for you. This time - you can make the difference says Nick Clegg

LEADERS' DEBATE UPDATE: We want to raise education level of poorest children to the same level as those at fee-paying schools - Nick Clegg

These were however accompanied by links to the Liberal Democrat manifesto, and can thus be seen as emissary memes, facilitating its replication as well as being reasonably successful replicators in themselves.

The striking thing about the reaction to the television debates on the Liberal Democrat wall was the audience response. This was not only more extensive than for the other parties, but more complex as well. In terms of the level of replication, it not only included a much larger volume of posts-as-memes, it also included a reasonable number of variations on the 'I agree with Nick' pop-cultural meme which was initially derived from the first debate. For example, simple statuses such as:

A vote for change is to change our vote! I would be delighted at the introduction of the change to the electoral system as has been proposed by the Lib Dems. It would be a real step forward! So I say I Agree With Nick !! :-D (Tim Hiley, Liberal Democrat Page, 30th April)

Unlike the 'vote x, get y' meme noted in connection to the Conservative page, 'I agree with Nick' does not appear to have been decoded here as a set of obvious, discrete and exchangeable alleles. As a consequence this 'copy the product' replication of the meme resulted in imperfect replication such as "Nick Clegg I agree with you" (Shazia Khan, 21st April) and "I agree with Nick Clegg" (Rich Shearer, 16th April), which nevertheless maintain the original meaning and propagandistic effect. Other variations on this meme were more complicated (in form as much as content) even going some way towards compensating for the party's reluctance to capitalise directly on the meme noted in Chapter 6. This reluctance was in any case less marked on their Facebook page than their homepage (for example they altered the profile picture to include a reference to the meme). Paul Downes (16th April) posted a link to some 'I agree with Nick' wallpaper whilst Rich Shearer was amongst those promoting the T-Shirts and other merchandise noted in Chapters 7. Several people such as David Sleeman, Tom Grundy and Cristin Mackenzie also provided 'Lib Dem' themed profile pictures similar to the centrally encouraged and distributed ones provided by Labour. This kind of self-replicating (i.e. not centrally organised) citizen generated propaganda is the ideal consequence of a digital campaign as described by Tom Roach and was very much in evidence in the 2008 Obama campaign.

There was also evidence of some virally organised complaints following the second debate in response to feelings that Nick Clegg was interrupted by the host in breach of the debate's rules. Comments such as these were posted following the Sky News Debate:

I've just complained to Ofcom about Adam Boulton's unfair questioning of Nick and only Nick last night. If you want to do so, go here: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/complain/progs/specific/> (Chris Jones, 23rd April)

Similarly on April 24th Kelly Jones added “I have also just put a complaint to Ofcom about Nick Clegg’s unfair treatment! Lets hope that idiot Adam Boulton gets what he deserves :)”. What they demonstrate are examples of ‘copy the instructions’ memes in which the instructions are not implicit or explicit directions for reproducing the meme itself, but instructions to follow a replicable action. This was a matter which also ended up being picked up by the more mainstream media, with links to a Guardian (Sweeney, 2010) article covering the issue posted by Mike Gerrard on 24th April and claiming the campaign resulted in “more than 100 complaints” to the media regulator Ofcom. The use of the ‘copy the instructions’ category here is in accordance with the use of the term suggested by Blackmore in her example of a photocopied recipe - with the soup as the product and the recipe as the instructions. It is also in accordance with the notion suggested by Ellul (1973) that propaganda is itself inextricably bound up with actions as well as ideas. The form of ‘copy the instructions’ meme which gives instructions for executing an action or constructing a product, at least as manifest in this example, is distinct from the previous examples of ‘copy the instructions’ memes in that not only does it not contain instructions for its own replication, it is not formed of easily recognisable, substitutable alleles in the manner common to many pop-cultural memes, for example the *mydavidcameron.com* and Obama ‘Hope’ posters.

The more complex and imaginative citizen generated propaganda present on the Liberal Democrat page suggests a potential for Facebook as a complementary resource alongside the televised debates. However the lacklustre enthusiasm on the other pages suggests that, as with much of the digital campaign, this potential can only be realised with a certain degree of innate enthusiasm by supporters which was for the most part in short supply in 2010. Irrespective of the fate of televised debates in subsequent elections, the removal of the capacity to post such comments to the Liberal Democrat wall may have rendered the platform less accessible to this politically and digitally engaged support base, assuming that the party’s sustained drop in the polls during its experience within the coalition government, has not undermined it on a more fundamental level (Dommett, 2013). Given the suggestion by the party that repeated negative comments or ‘trolling’ of their page played a part in the decision to remove the comment feature in 2011 (Lockwood), it is possible that this may indeed be a difficulty for the party in 2015.

Citizen generated propaganda and the wider Facebook conversation

The citizen generated propaganda discussed above was not limited to counter-propaganda in reaction to the TV debates, although these debates were a catalyst for conversation on the party Facebook walls. This section will examine the wider conversation which took place amongst citizens on Facebook, with a focus on instances of self-organisation and citizen generated propaganda.

Although much of the noteworthy citizen generated propaganda which can be considered memetic in the pop-cultural sense was focused on the Liberal Democrat Facebook wall and has already been discussed in Chapter 7, however a greater focus on the academic definition of the meme can uncover interesting propagandistic trends within the Labour and Conservative walls as well.

The previous section discussed the media convergence between the broadcast television debates and social media. However there is another kind of convergence which is particularly relevant to the Liberal Democrat campaign: the physical convergence of supporters in a real world location. The notion of extending the digital campaign onto the streets in terms of organising supporters to knock on doors and engage in other traditional 'get out the vote' activities was a fundamental aspect of the Liberal Democrat digital campaign – arguably to the detriment in some respects of pure digital organisation (see Chapters 5 and 6). However there was one particular instance of self-organised physical convergence which appeared on their Facebook page and deserves a closer examination through the lenses of memetic propaganda theory: the digitally organised convergence of people on a specific, physical location or 'flashmob'. Like the virally organised complaints about the treatment of Clegg on the Sky News leaders' debate, flashmobs can be seen as another example of the 'copy the instructions' meme in which the initial memes spread instructions for a secondary action (the 'product'), which can also be imitated and thus considered a meme.

There is no evidence that either Labour or the Conservatives achieved this kind of spontaneous, self-organised action, but there were approximately thirty references to flashmobs on the Liberal Democrat page. The first reference by Sean James Cameron came on April 4th, before the upsurge in interest in the page and referred to an anti-Conservative rather than explicitly pro-Liberal Democrat flashmob. It was in opposition to perceived homophobia within the Tory party and associated lack of 'serious' policies on gay issues. However towards the end of the campaign, a flashmob was organised in Trafalgar square, specifically to endorse the Liberal Democrats and "prove that the two party state is over!" (Alex Ashman, April 28th). The notion of propaganda as inextricable from action – in this case the action of public assembly - is particularly salient in terms of Jacques Ellul's understanding of the concept. From his theoretical perspective the memes which made up 'Cleggmania' and the associated conversations they inspired, both online and off, could be seen to constitute the sociological prelude to a propagated action. Most obviously this would be to vote but would certainly not exclude actions designed to further promote the Liberal Democrats, their policies, symbols and ideas. From the meme's eye view the successful creation of a flashmob creates a physical space in which people with whom, in this case, Liberal Democrat memes, already resonate gather together and thus create more opportunities for further Liberal Democrat based memes to

replicate. Such memes could include for example pro-liberal democrat ideas, campaigning tips and symbols. The promotion of symbols was already part of the Liberal Democrat flashmob as expressed on their Facebook page, as repeated calls from posters such as Mevan Babakar (April 29th) and Lucy Gummer (April 29th) urged participants to “wear Yellow”. In this case the replication of the party colour is clearly memetic at least in part, and intended as a marker scheme symbol comparable to the use of green by the Conservatives discussed in Chapter 6 but without the subsequent suggestions of insincerity. The replication of the notion of public assembly spread beyond the original meeting point of Trafalgar Square via both Facebook and Twitter using the hashtag #LibDemFlashmob. The evolution of this action without the need for centralised control is characteristic of successful digital campaigning. It also incorporates the merger of Bandwagon and public Testimonial which are similarly common themes within digital campaigns. The horizontally organised public action demonstrates the enthusiasm of feeling amongst supporters, promoting the party as representative of a popular movement and as the event is organised by those outside of the elite political establishment, it can circumvent the general mood of scepticism and political malaise directed towards professional politicians and their PR operatives (See Chapter 5).

If the level of analysis is altered so that the notion of the Liberal Democrat flashmob itself is seen as a meme which can be documented and reported by the media (including on digital media), the mere presence of congregated supporters can be seen as propaganda for a party in that they generate and replicate positive images and stories, thus raising its media profile. However, the replication of citizen generated propaganda can also carry more specific memes relating to relevant ideas or policy. For example, in addition to creating a physical environment in which pro-Liberal Democrat ideas could be spread, the Liberal Democrat flashmob replicated alongside the hashtag <#libdemmajority>, a more succinct replication of the earlier sentiment about ending the two party system (Alex Ashman, April 28th). The replication of conceptual ideas with a less recognisable, coherent form is something of a methodological and empirical difficulty for memetics, if not necessarily a theoretical one. The internalisation and interpretation of an idea as it is absorbed and decoded by a recipient, allows for an enormous amount of variation in the form of that idea if it is then replicated. Although variation is itself a key aspect of any evolutionary theory, memetics included, it does pose a difficulty in terms of demonstrating that the idea, once replicated is *the same meme* as the idea when originally internalised by an individual mind. Within the memetic theory of propaganda – particularly as it is applied to digital campaigns – this capacity of individuals to internalise an idea and recreate it in a way which is appropriate for the environment with which they are faced is considered an asset. It is this capacity which Tom Roach (2006) refers to in his discussion of internalisation and the co-creation of a brand identity.

When addressing replication at the conceptual level, the level of ideas, there may still be indications of replication in the form of recognisable words and phrases which imply replication rather than spontaneous co-creation. Examples of the replication of these kinds of ideological memes can be found on the party Facebook walls. On the Conservative page for example this can be seen in the extensive aggression towards those in receipt of state benefits. For example Matt Davies posted “Free condoms should be given out with all benefits that should stop the ferral scum breeding” (May 9th) and “Bye bye benefit claiming scum the Tories are coming home!” (May 6th). Similarly, Micky Lee Hollywood posted “It's funny. The most mp's who was swindling the expenses were labour. The most people on benefits not wanting to work are labour voters. I see a pattern here” (5th May). In this case the repeated idea of benefit claimants as “lazy arses” (Richard Vanbergen, 9th April) and a drain on public finances (Matt Davies 2nd April) was also used to mount class based attacks on detractors who ventured on to the page. For example Micky Lee Hollywood refers to John Anderton as “benefit boy” (9th May) and accuses him of being a “layabout chav” (ibid). An attitude which could call into question the extent to which the ‘detoxification’ of the Conservative brand discussed in relation to the party’s homepage, extended to the attitudes held by its supporters.

The significance of this kind of ideological replication is not simply that certain ideas can replicate in service of one party or another throughout the wider meme-pool, although this kind of observation is an analytical advantage of taking the broader environmental perspective. The presence of posts expressing such ideological sentiments within the specific environment of the Facebook page can arguably act as a selection pressure within that environment as a smaller meme pool, internal to the page viewed as a vehicle. In the case of the hostile and aggressive comments described above, the effect could reasonably be expected to act as a deterrent to conversation and an invitation to hostility and bickering; those who disagree with some aspects of a party’s position but wish to engage in rational debate or to find common ground are greeted with derision whilst those who simply wish to provoke a reaction are given exactly the response they set out to achieve. In addition those who wished to engage in serious conversation with fellow supporters of a party can be distracted by such confrontations – effectively lowering the overall tone of the debate and potentially even discouraging people who are not in search of an argument from posting again.

This selective pressure is the essence of trolling which the final section of this chapter will explore in more detail along with its relationship to propaganda. However there is another way in which selection pressure can influence the tone and content of posts on a Facebook wall, one which relates directly to the shortcomings of crowd sourcing and co-creation identified by Clifford Singer, creator of *mydavidcameron.com*. Singer argued that for a digital campaign which relies on crowd sourcing to

be effective, someone needs to exercise editorial quality control (Singer, 2010b). From the meme's eye view this form of selection pressure is similar to that described by Dennett as "methodical selection" (Dennett, 2003: How we captured reasons and made them our own) in which the evolution of specific memes is deliberately influenced by individuals exercising a strategic selection pressure by encouraging or inhibiting the replication of specific memes. In the case of digital campaigning, the system must be hybridised in order to take advantage of the collective creative intelligence of a support base, without degenerating into the inane, facile and repetitive. However it should be noted that the editorial control must be skilfully exercised, as demonstrated by Saatchi and Saatchi's poor choice of crowd sourced campaign poster within the Labour campaign discussed in Chapter 6. The Liberal Democrat wall did contain some detractors such as Tinder Singh S, a Conservative supporter and George Snape for Labour, but the overall environment of the wall was overwhelmingly positive towards the party thanks in part to the huge numbers of contributors when compared to Labour and the Conservatives. This could perhaps explain why the Liberal Democrat poetry competition flourished in this environment, despite the lack of high quality contributors⁵⁰.

The competition was first mentioned on 1st April, before the upsurge in participation on the page; however even at this stage the extent to which the supporters engaged with the page was high, despite having relatively fewer subscribers. The link was posted by active supporter Joe Rinaldi Johnson who appears on the Liberal Democrat page as a youth member (Liberal Democrats, 2009). The responses from other supporters ranged from those directed against the party's opponents, such as this one by Oliver Withinreason from April 4th:

Trident : A poem
 Gordon Brown has got a warhead or three
 lurking in a submarine in the north sea
 you see its vitally important to retain our nuclear industry
 with an investment of 25 billion pounds from the public treasury
 and when its passed through which it will inevitably be
 we will see there wont be any warheads pointed at you
 and there wont be any warheads pointed at me

And a number praising Nick Clegg following the first debate, such as this contribution by Jessica Davies on April 17th

A POEM ABOUT THE CLEGGSTER

⁵⁰ Line endings within these poems are an estimate of their appearance in the original posts as the full text was not preserved in the PDF documents from which the latter portion of Appendix J was retrieved, although it was retained in the Excel database available in Appendix I as these posts were collected directly from the web.

That Nick he is so foxy,
hes defo got some mocksy.
I think his manifesto

is the bloody besto.

That Cameron and that Brown,
they only make me frown,
and sometimes I just wish they'd both just bloody drown.

Clegg stands for change,
that's the name of the game,
so get out there and vote for his mother flippin' name!

The party even inspired a 'rap' posted on May 4th under the pseudonym Ago Agony-rinseout

CONCERVATIVES, LABOUR , BNP,
NONE OF YOU PUSSIES WILL GET VOTES FRM ME,
YOUR ALL POSH TOFFS SIPPIN ON TEA,
WHILE KIDS DIE FRM THESE MAN MADE E'S
GET ON THE VOTE FOR LIB DEMS PLZ,
DUNO WHY PEPS VOTE FOR THE BEE'S,
WHO STING US TO OUR KNEES,
WITH THE TAXES THEY BELIEVE,
WILL HELP US , ITS NOT LIKE THE GOVERNMENT FELT US
WE CAN ONLY PUT UP WITH WOT THEY DEALT US
LEAVE GLOBAL WARMIN TILL IT MIGHT JUST MELT US
WITHOUT YOUR VOTE PEPS OUR FUTURES HELPLESS!

Literary criticism (and in the case of the rap, potentially humorous intent) aside, the point of this analysis is not to deride the contributors to the Liberal Democrat poetry competition, but to address the material from the perspective of memetic propaganda theory. The initial post can be seen as a 'copy the instructions' meme, albeit not an especially successful one, of which these poems can be seen as the 'product', however there are no obvious substitutable alleles or implicit instructions for the replication of a pop-cultural meme such as the mydavidcameron.com or Obama 'Hope' posters. In fact, whilst they lack the success of the Obama inspired memes, the poems here can be compared in form to the products of the 'Art for Obama' movement documented by Hal Eliot Wert (2009), in that the instructional memes 'produce art inspired by Obama' and 'produce poetry inspired by

Clegg/the Liberal democrats' resulted in highly distinct variations in terms of the product, which can nevertheless be seen as stemming from the same meme.

The party has here been successful in inspiring its supporters to create memes which include messages of support for the party as well as references to specific policies, personalities and encouragements to cast a ballot in their favour. This is the very essence of co-creation as described by Roach (2006), but these poems are arguably still not effective memes of propaganda for the Liberal Democrats. The purpose of co-creation is to produce memes which can resonate more effectively with members of an 'out-group' such as Liberal Democrat sympathisers who are not yet either supporters or party members, or swing voters who have not yet decided on a party. Propagating policy positions through a catchy rhyme or lampooning rivals with a comic verse might not necessarily be a bad way of achieving that goal – especially considering evidence that humour makes for effective pop-cultural replication (Shifman and Thelwall, 2009, Shifman, 2012) - but the examples posted to Facebook simply don't do so very effectively. They failed to resonate, or replicate well even amongst those who sympathised with the sentiments expressed, (they all received fewer than 10 interactions, the highest being the 'rap' with 9, which is much lower than the mean average of 53 received by posts from the party). As a consequence they have little potential as memes replicating in the Liberal Democrat interests. There may have been some propagandistic potential in the deliberate replication of them by rival parties as a kind of inverse Bandwagon technique, painting the supporters of the party as juvenile and illiterate, although there is no evidence that any of the other parties even noticed the competition or its potential.

The notion of citizen generated propaganda is easiest to understand through practices which are more obviously memetic in the pop-cultural sense, although this may span multiple levels of replication both online and off. The viral organisation of a flashmob or the replication of a pro-party Facebook status or profile picture effectively spreads a party's message and in the case of the flashmob can also create a physical space in which multiple pro-party ideas, symbols and slogans can be exchanged and evolved more effectively, in addition to providing a public statement of support which can serve a propagandistic purpose in its own right. However, just because pro-party replicators are created by supporters rather than internal PR professionals, does not mean they will necessarily be better replicators, or better promotional vehicles for a party's message than more traditional avenues for publicity. When addressed as a distinct environment, the selection pressures which act within a quasi-public, quasi-party space such as a Facebook wall can produce material which appears heavily influenced by the in-group selection pressures present within the space, viewed as a memetic environment. These pressures can also be self-reinforcing, as hostility to out-

group members prevents the free and equitable exchange of ideas (see Sparkes-Vian, 2013 for a similar pattern in Youtube comments). The next section will undertake a closer examination of the role of hostility and trolling on party Facebook pages and its relationship to censorship – a concept which needs to be examined in order to fully develop a memetic perspective on propaganda.

Trolling, flaming and negativity

Trolling and flaming or the expression of antagonistic, aggressive and threatening behaviour in an online forum in order to provoke a response, has provoked some academic discussion and as reported in *The Education Journal* (2012), has even been raised as an issue in Parliament. Whilst a distinction has been drawn academically between flaming, which is a base attempt to antagonise, and trolling, which implies a more subtle form of hostile engagement where at least a veneer of genuine participation is maintained (see Herring et al., 2002), in much of the literature trolling has been viewed as not only highly aggressive but as a potentially serious crime which is in violation of the *Malicious Communications Act 1988* and the *Communications Act 2003* (see for example The Education Journal (eds), 2012). Together these laws prohibit communication which is indecent, obscene, grossly offensive, threatening or menacing. Ironically those engaged in the parliamentary debate appear to have no idea that the practice was flourishing on their parties' Facebook pages as recently as the last election. It has also been discussed in the context of cyber bullying, such as in Sarah Nicol's study which also suggests that "there are times it is appropriate to report [trolling] to the police" (2012:4). As such studies looked at trolling as an apolitical form of harassment with little but the relative anonymity of the Internet to disguise it from offline bullying they had nothing to say about its relationship with propaganda. Their focus was on the impact on victims, particularly the young, who were seen as especially vulnerable to the practice, although not the exclusive target, and on ways in which the problem could be tackled.

Susan Herring's (2002) investigation into trolling introduced a more political angle as it looked at the problems caused by a single troll who entered a feminist forum with the intent of disrupting it, and the attempts by the forum's moderators and regular contributors to deal with that disruption. Although the only explicit references to propaganda were in the pejorative sense (the troll in question accused forum members of spreading "feminist propaganda lies" (ibid:378)) the central theme of Herring's (2002) argument was especially relevant to the philosophical difficulties which the Liberal Democrats experienced when encountering trolls and flammers. In the case of the feminist forum, Herring argues that the troll 'Kent', exploited a tension within feminist online space between the need to provide a safe environment in which feminists feel comfortable – especially where they are discussing difficult topics such as domestic and sexual violence – and the philosophy of

inclusiveness, freedom of expression and open debate which forms part of both the ideology of feminism as expressed within the forum she analysed and the wider culture of the Internet. The notion of an online 'safe space' of this kind can be understood memetically as a forum/vehicle which facilitates the replication of memes which relate to topics that may be difficult to express or are subject to a repressive backlash in other environments. Such spaces ostensibly form an environment which provides an opportunity for such memes to replicate, but (as will become clear in the case of the 2010 election) the presence of trolls and flammers can disrupt such environments, providing barriers to replication as they derail debate.

The exploitation of this desire to promote open debate is particularly relevant to the Liberal Democrat experience because the principals of open debate are fundamental to liberal philosophy. This made it difficult to block trolls who persistently claim to be attempting to engage in real debate, but with the effect and objective of disrupting discussion between regular contributors. There were also some posts on all of the pages which can be seen as flaming rather than trolling; the distinction as defined by Herring (2002) is that trolling offers a pretence of rational engagement whilst flaming, which would include comments such as "vote BNP" (Joe Dodd, Liberal Democrats, 12th April) "Ignorant Tory bastards who only want to look after the richer population, Selfish stuckup twats." (Megan Wiseman-Davies, Conservative Page, May 5th) and "Come on labour gimps, your wilting...." (Matt Hockin, 9th May, Labour Page), simply seeks to offend or antagonise. Trolling by contrast, attempts to draw people into pseudo debate under the guise of reasonable discussion, although in everyday usage, such as on the Facebook pages in this corpus, the distinction between these categories is blurred and the term 'troll' is used to cover both trolling and flaming. The posts of the Conservative Tندر Singh S on the Liberal Democrat Facebook wall are a good example of trolling. Tندر's approach was to repost identical or very similar phrases; arguments against the Liberal Democrat policies, endorsements of the Conservative Party and assertions that the Liberal Democrats cannot possibly win the election – the latter usually accompanied by the claim that a vote for the Liberal Democrats will keep Labour in power. For example this post is repeated almost identically three times (twice on April 21st once on April 22nd):

The Liberal Democrats cannot win this election. That is fact. A vote for the Liberal Democrats means one of two things. Either Labour get in through the back door, or there is a hung parliament then a Liberal/Labour alliance with Gordon Brown as PM. Four more years of Gordon Brown anyone ????

He initially inspires a considerable amount of engagement and debate with one poster Ze Tony (21st April) even requesting a "lengthy debate" on Liberal policy. However soon other posters begin to express frustration with him: "is really bored of Tندر now..." (Natalia Sanchez-Bell, 22nd April), "At

the risk of trashing someone in public. Tinder, you are really making yourself out to be a complete arse and it's time to stop.” (Michael Joseph Cole, 22nd April). These were accompanied by complaints that whilst he professed to want a real debate Tinder was in fact “just repeating same old cack” (Philip Michulitis, 22nd April) and engaging in “naff sloganeering” (Ze Tony, 22nd April). There is evidence of all of the strategies used to try and combat trolling in Herring’s work, from the engagement already discussed to calls to ignore him (Claire Griffin, 22nd April), insults “believes that Tinder needs to join a dating agency.” (Hyder Jawad, 22nd April) and calls to have him banned “Everyone please report Tinder. Thank you” (Chris Pruden, 21st April), “believes that if everybody reports Tinder, Facebook will realise that this person is a website stalker.” (Hyder Jawad, 22nd April). In the case of Tinder these calls went unheeded as he had apparently not broken any of the specific rules governing Facebook behaviour. However trolls on the Liberal Democrat page appear to have been successful in tempting others into breaking Facebook’s rules sufficiently to get actual supporters such as Claire Griffin and Austin Biggs blocked, which Claire argued that was a deliberate tactic on behalf of the disruptive posters who were “trying to block those of us that are answering questions...” (23rd April).

Both the calls for trolls to be banned and the successful blocking of supporters by trolls are evidence of an interesting counterpoint to citizen generated propaganda: citizen initiated censorship. Like much of the more successful digital strategies it relies on utilising the hybrid mixture of hierarchy and horizontally distributed networks found within social networking sites (Gerbaudo, 2012, Shirky, 2008), and also within the classic digital campaign structure (Trippi, 2004, Plouffe, 2009, Davis, 2005). Whilst citizen generated propaganda relies on crowd-sourcing to create replicators in favour of (or opposition to) a particular cause or organisation, the initiation of censorship can be a more straightforward matter of appealing to an administrator or moderator to prevent people from posting. From the perspective of the memetic environment, censorship is a selection pressure which inhibits the replication of certain memes. From the meme's eye view therefore, censorship can in a sense be seen as the true antithesis of propaganda in that it involves techniques for the prevention of the proliferation of memes rather than their replication. At the differential level however, the effect is the same as any other propaganda technique, i.e. the proliferation of certain memes over others. This applies not only to censorship by moderators, but also to the actions of the trolls themselves. For the Conservative troll on the Liberal Democrat page, preventing people from conversing normally, either by goading them into saying something offensive and then getting them blocked, or by spamming the page with posts designed to derail the debate, results in Conservative policies and pro-conservative/anti-Liberal ideas being replicated (and reacted to). This uses up space and time which could otherwise have been dedicated to the proliferation of Liberal memes. In terms

of opportunities for replication within Facebook's specific structure, attracting large numbers of comments (Tinder Sing S often got over 10 responses in addition to being mentioned in subsequent independent posts) - even derisory ones, effectively makes the troll's memes better replicators within that system, outcompeting rival posts which express less hostile sentiments.

Unlike the examples in Herring's (2002) research the Liberal Democrats were beset by multiple trolls/flamers rather than a single individual and although they appear to have been unable to remove Tinder, this was not the universal rule. There are several calls to report abuse and for volunteer "trollbusters" (Michael Howe, 26th April) and multiple posts which refer to trolls or abusive posts which have since been removed "the trolls have deleted all there hate once I mentioned I reported" (Lucy Staples, 26th April), "theres more trolls on here than on lord of the rings 1 2 and 3" (Jc Chury, April 30th), "Is this lady a Labour or Tory Troll?" (Jan Berrington, April 27th), the latter two comments are not surrounded by any obviously 'trollish' posts. This suggests that there was a certain amount of success in removing some posters who were causing so much disruption that Rachel Edwards (April 21st) complained "the trolls are becoming a serious problem, we can't talk properly because of these asshats". As previously noted, there is some evidence that the volunteer moderators many have been eventually overwhelmed by the number of posts and began an extreme moderation policy which removed vast swathes of data. To the extent that moderators managed to remove the trolls, this form of collectively initiated censorship can be seen as a successful reassertion of Liberal selection pressure within the space of the Liberal Facebook page. However, if the absence of posts in key points during the campaign was due to the inability to cope with prolific trolling, resulting in the blanket removal of posts by supporters and detractors alike, this can be seen as a great selection pressure victory on behalf of the trolls, as they forced self-censorship on the page as the price of their removal.

In keeping with their more autocratic ideological position, the Conservative page does not show evidence of the kind of engagement strategies that Liberal supporters took, although there are hostile responses to some posters, (such as those expressed by Micky Lee Hollywood in the previous section on selection pressure and ideological memes). There is also evidence here that posts have been removed by moderators, although not to the same degree or as indiscriminately as on the Liberal Democrat page. Posts such as "now that those two communists have been deleted, it looks like I've been arguing with myself on one of my previous posts!" (Guy Murray, March 28th), indicate that those antagonising the regular contributors on the Conservative page were removed and their posts deleted. A few posts such as "over 100k fans now. Shame so many of them are Trolls" (Ouvrielle Holmes, 9th May), complained about trolling specifically but most responded like Murray

and Hollywood with specific attacks against individual posters. There are however no indications that any supporters were removed from the page, or that those trolling the Conservatives were tactically organised in the way implied by posts on the Liberal Democrat wall. Interestingly Micky Lee Hollywood described himself as a troll ("I feel like a troll today", 10th May) in reference to posts such as "if this was labours site 25% of people would be banned due to them believing in free speech." (10th May) and "Labour scum must die muahahahaaa. Stuff fox hunting. Bring on labour hunting" (10th May).

This is an interesting interpretation of trolling, posting aggressive comments on a party page but against that party's opponents not against the party itself. Whilst it does not necessarily conform to the pattern of trolling identified by Herring (2002), it does make sense from the meme's eye view. Such hostile comments can replicate not only unchallenged but within an environment dominated by those who broadly agree with the sentiments expressed. The differential effects on replication when addressing the page as an environment, i.e. the facilitation of hostility over rational argument and the stifling of contrary points of view through aggression, remain the same as when expressed on the page of an opponent and thus can still be considered a form of censorship. This practice was also evident on Labour's page, where the ratio of hostile posts was very high – as noted their most prolific poster was vociferously anti-Labour. Given that posts such as "Come on Gordon, it's embarrassing now; where's your coat? Taxi for Gordon...." (Matt Hockin, May 7th) and "Some people wither, fade and die after retirement, I can only hope Gordon is one of them. Unconstructive, trollish, but I f*cking hate the man, hate him!" (Richard Alderton, May 11th). Remained on the page, it seems unlikely that many posts were removed which is in keeping with the generally low levels of interaction with Labour on Facebook, although there was at least one complaint by Matthew Turner asking:

Who's the cunt who deleted my post from before just because you can't face that I'm right and I'm changing peoples opinions of how you feel about labour by showing you what's really going on under cover of your perfect little world.

This suggests that individual posts may have been deleted, rather than blocking individuals.

There was also evidence of pro-Labour trolling in particular by Jamie McDonald who repeatedly posted comments such as:

Clegg is a cunt cameron is a cunt Us in Scotland votes against the tories yet we are going to be governed by this shower of inbred toff fox murdering bastards Party at mine when thatcher dies (May 7th)

This is a fairly typical example of both the tone and level of profanity he expressed throughout the campaign. The point is that once again this kind of post can have a potentially inhibiting effect on the wall as an environment by discouraging already disheartened Labour supporters from interacting at all, given the levels of aggression repeatedly displayed by those participating in discussion. This is especially problematic for Labour as the 'Word of Mouth' campaign suggests the need, not only for supporters to interact with their online presence, but also for them to be able to do so in a way which is likely to encourage interaction by others. Possibly, in addition to the point frequently argued in this thesis that a successful digital campaign requires a dedicated and technologically savvy supporter base, that supporter base should ideally be sufficiently erudite to communicate and effectively propagate the party's ideas and brand message, rather than trading insults with opponents in the party's public, digital space. The presence of trolls, either for or against a party in such a space, places a party in an awkward philosophical position, caught between the active censorship of moderation and the differential censorship which results from the presence of trolls. However, characterising this as a philosophical rather than a practical choice, assumes that the party in question possesses either the financial means or the extensive network of active supporters, required to undertake the task of moderating their page effectively.

Conclusion: The limited wisdom of crowds

The empirical results of the analysis in this chapter principally confirm ideas discussed throughout the rest of the study. The increased correlation between electoral events and Facebook interaction bolsters the arguments about media convergence; the relative lack of enthusiasm (especially for Labour) further confirms the paucity of the environment for the proliferation of pro-party memes and the high levels of interaction on the Liberal Democrat Facebook page correlates with the greater proliferation of pro-party pop-cultural memes in their favour. Whilst the Conservative's relatively high levels of interaction (compared to Labour) could be seen as a challenge to the notion of a top-down Conservative campaign style, the comparatively reactive nature of this interaction – in particular compared to the Liberal Democrats – continues to support the argument that they existed at the hierarchical end of a horizontal/vertical communications spectrum.

The crowd-sourcing approach, which is arguably consistent with best practice digital campaigning as discussed in Chapter 3, has not always proved successful. There was some evidence of collective organisation on the Liberal Democrat page, including complaints to Ofcom about Nick Clegg's treatment by Adam Boulton during the first leaders' debate and attempts to organise pro-Liberal Democrat flashmobs. However these events appeared to be limited to the Liberal Democrat pages, a place which also featured the Liberal Democrat poetry competition, an attempt at brand co-creation

which resulted in only a small number of entries which failed to replicate at the level of a pop-cultural meme, highlighting once again Singer's point about the necessity of effective editorial control when utilising crowd sourcing as a design tool. Such unfortunate examples of brand co-creation gone awry can be explained by a relative homogeny in the memetic environment, something which existed on the Liberal Democrat page prior to the later influx of trolls and flammers. The presence of such homogeny allows for the replication of memes which would be unlikely to survive in less hospitable environments.

The further development of the notion of an environmental methodological tool in addition to the meme's eye view proved a useful complement particularly in conjunction with the 'level of replication' and 'vehicle' tools. That is, whilst the meme's eye view remains a highly useful means by which a researcher can explore the opportunities for replication which exist within a memetic environment, those observations must, by definition, involve a micro analysis of the opportunities facing a single meme. The pseudo-intentionality which is bestowed upon the meme by this methodological approach essentially trumps the real or metaphorical intentionality of either the individual (e.g. the page moderator) or the institution (e.g. Facebook as a corporate body). Augmenting the meme's eye view with a broader environmental perspective allows for an analysis which can better appreciate the role of such entities and in particular the consequences of their ability to instigate broad, all-encompassing selection pressures on the memes within a given environment.

The use of the vehicle as a methodological tool and conceptual category is more problematic. What this analysis, and that of the previous two chapters, has identified is a category of memeplex which, whilst it does not easily replicate as a unit, does act as a space or catalyst for the generation of other memes which do. These smaller memes can then act as emissaries, providing links which can draw minds into that digital space and thus consume (and potentially replicate) more of the memes contained within it. The question of whether this is sufficient to consider this category of memeplex a vehicle remains open. The vehicle in biology is essentially a device for the propagation and protection of genes, criteria which this category of memeplex broadly fulfils. However the paucity of the boundaries of the Facebook page and the ineffectiveness of the moderators in preventing damaging, hostile interactions could challenge the notion of this form of vehicle as a protected space, at least within this example. Possibly this should be seen as further evidence that biological categories should be included in a memetic analysis only as far as they illuminate, rather than seeking for a strict parity which is unlikely to stretch across both sets of replicators. The notion of the Facebook page as a porous but still discrete memetic environment, with specific, localised selection

pressures caused by the presence of moderators and the balance of political agreement amongst the contributors, is arguably a useful notion when embarking on an analysis of memetic replication within Facebook as an environment. It is this notion of the memetic realm as one of myriad, intersecting environments which each have localised selection pressures, as well as overarching ones shared by other localised environments within the wider body politic, which the 'environmental' methodological tool is seeking to explore.

The addition of the notion of censorship as both a hierarchical and differential restriction on the propagation of memes flows naturally from the conception of the Facebook page as a memetic ecology in which selection is taking place. The hierarchical restriction on replication - as instigated by either Facebook or a moderator - is a fairly traditional notion of the concept in terms of power relations. The institution which governs the network or the individuals who mediate a page have the power to enact either methodical memetic selection, choosing which memes may replicate within a given environment, or to apply broad rules with the same basic result (Liberal Democrat difficulties in managing their page notwithstanding). However the notions of citizen generated and differential censorship are more novel and also specific to a memetic analysis. Citizen generated censorship is the obvious counterpart to citizen generated propaganda in that it involves citizens who desire a specific form of environment in which their conversations are not derailed by hostile contributors (or potentially just those with whom they disagree), requesting the kind of hierarchical selection pressure by moderators which characterises traditional censorship. This runs somewhat counter to the liberal notion of the free exchange of ideas, but when the differential effects of trolling and flaming are considered, the ethical implications are more complex. Differential censorship is also citizen generated but more subtle, in that it does not involve the intervention of an overarching authority figure. The effect of trolling/flaming as manifest on the party Facebook pages was a form of differential censorship where the trolls attracted disproportionate attention from regular contributors. This not only increased the replicator power of 'trollish' memes because posts on Facebook replicate through interaction, it drew the resources of time and mental energy away from the replication of pro-party memes in favour of responses attacking the interloper. Especially where this form of conversational derailment is the intended consequence of an interaction (as is arguably the case with the kind of trolling observed by Henning et al (2002)), it can in fact be considered a more subtle form of censorship, given that the intention is to prevent the spread of specific memes, and in the case of this study, to prevent that spread on party political grounds.

The relationship between the pop-cultural meme and the 'copy the instructions' meme was also explored in more detail in this chapter. Specifically the notion that the implicit 'copy the instructions'

memes, which appears to be common within pop-cultural memes such as the *mydavidcameron.com* posters, is distinct from the explicit 'copy the instructions' meme in which a meme that is itself replicated, also provides instructions for a subsequent action or artefact (the product), which can also be imitated and thus considered a replicator in its own right. This would include the encouragements to congregate for the Liberal Democrat flashmob whilst wearing yellow. These two variations on the 'copy the instructions' meme are both of theoretical value when it comes to the memetic understanding of propaganda. The first allows for the distinctly digital practice of brand co-creation and adaptation advocated by Tom Roach and observed in particular during Obama's run for President (see Chapter 3). The latter allows for the inclusion of the kind of 'propaganda for action' which more traditional propaganda theorists - notably Jaques Ellul (1973)- considered a vital aspect of propaganda in practice.

Chapter Nine: Memetics, Propaganda and Democracy

The memetic conception of propaganda explored within this study concurs with an established, if unconventional view within the literature that characterises propaganda as a neutral category rather than a pejorative term. As a consequence the evaluation of propaganda throughout the more empirical portion of this study has often been from the perspective of success i.e. 'good propaganda' is that which propagates furthest. However, setting the moral issues associated with the propagation of ideas aside when defining propaganda is not a means to ignore such issues, rather it is a way to ensure that those issues are given a discrete, critical examination in the context of the time and place in which a specific technique of propaganda is used. This is first due to the view that all academics, particularly in cultural and political fields have a responsibility to address such issues with respect to their work. Secondly, from the perspective of practical analysis, philosophers as distinct as Dennett (2003), Nietzsche (2007) and Foucault (As discussed in Hay, 2002) have observed that morality itself *evolves* over time, something which also holds true for mediated social norms within digital culture (McLaughlin and Vitak, 2012).

Whilst evolution suggests building on what has gone before, rather than an absolute, radical transformation, this still presents a problem. Given the central premise of this thesis, that propaganda is an evolving phenomenon, undertaking a universal moral appraisal of propaganda constitutes the evaluation of one constantly changing process from the perspective of a constantly changing set of values; a daunting task which (if possible at all) could not be achieved through a single case study. Therefore it is necessary to select an appropriate value system by which to judge the manifestations of digital propaganda within the context of the 2010 election. The ideals and practices of democracy constitute an appropriate vantage point for this analysis, not only because the case study itself was based around an election, but also because examining the relationship between democracy, propaganda and digital media will broaden this study's contribution to the on-going debate surrounding the Internet and democracy, a subject initially raised in Chapter 3 in the context of election campaigns (see Dean, 2009, Clift, 2000, Coleman, 2005, Curran et al., 2012, Davis, 2010, Deibert, 2009, Dutton et al., 1999, Freelon, 2010, Gerhards and Schäfer, 2010, Gibson and Ward, 2002, James, 2008, Janssen et al., 2005, Zittrain, 2008, Castells, 2012, Fuchs, 2012). As a consequence this chapter will attempt to extend the initial aims of this research by placing the theoretical and empirical work more firmly within the context of this wider debate, which will

contribute to both the theoretical and empirical aims of this research. The effectiveness of the methodological toolkit initially outlined in Chapter 4 will be evaluated in detail in Chapter 10.

The first section of this chapter will address democracy as a contested term, examining evaluations of the concept as an ideal or fantasy and as a really existing system of governance. This will form a normative basis on which to address a repeated theme of democratic significance which has arisen as a course of this research: the relationship of democracy to hierarchy and networked organisational structures. This theme is derived from the material within this case study but has a broader relevance outside of traditional electoral politics; therefore the final section of this chapter will use the memetic approach to address more recent events including the Arab Spring and global Occupy movement.

Democracy: Dream and reality

Democracy in the abstract is an excellent example of one of Lee and Lee's (1939) Glittering Generalities; it is a 'good' name which can be added to a concept, person, nation or institution in order to confer some of the associated virtue onto that entity. As such it can be seen as a dream or ideal, something without a real-world existence. Jodi Dean (2009) for example, argues that democracy is a neo-liberal fantasy, the perpetuation of which cements currently existing class structures and relationships of power and dominance. Specifically Dean's argument is that engagement with what she calls 'communicative capitalism' the proverbial marketplace of ideas, in particular as manifest on the Web, acts as a substitution for real world activism and thus prevents substantive social change. The equation of a democracy as a pleasing fantasy and democracy as a lie suggest very similar ontological assumptions to those made by Blackmore in her denunciation of the self and free will: the self, she argues is simply the product of memetic selection within the mind, it does not exist as a physical, central processor capable of making decisions and thus she considers it to be a 'lie'. As a consequence Blackmore proclaimed that she did not want "any version of free will that ascribes it to a self that does not exist" (1999:237). This ontological dichotomy, which posits an absolute distinction between the real and imaginary, truth and lies is precisely the objectivist philosophical position which this study has argued, is too inflexible to be usefully applied to the analysis of propaganda and which the application of memetics within this research has tried to avoid. A preferable perspective within the memetic cannon is that presented by Daniel Dennett (2003), in which he argues that the self exists as a decision making entity but that its capacity to manifest its influence on the world is distributed within the mind. Like Blackmore (1999), Dennett (2003, 1991) rejects the 'Cartesian theatre' model of the mind which views the self as a co-ordinating figure on an internal mental stage who holds opinions and makes decisions. However,

rather than concluding that this means the self is an illusion as Blackmore (1999) does, Dennett (2003) instead argues that the self still exists, as a distributed entity within the mind whose decisions and capacity to process information take time. He argues that the conclusion that the self does not exist comes from the tendency to try and pinpoint the exact moment, down to a fraction of a second, in which free will is exercised, thus externalising much of what could be considered the self, as well as the process of individual decision making. As he remarks repeatedly throughout *Freedom Evolves* “if you make yourself really small, you can externalize virtually anything”, a deliberately ironic formulation designed to draw attention to everything which can potentially be incorporated into the self (including free will) if it is permitted to exist across a greater span of time than a mere fraction of a second.

Democracy conceived as a dream need not be synonymous with a lie but with an ideal. As an ideal, democracy encompasses a powerful set of concepts such as emancipation, personal and collective agency and freedom from oppression and exploitation. Such principles have given those suffering under tyranny something to strive towards and even to suffer and die for. It also provides an edifying rhetoric and a set of expectations which really existing democracy often fails to meet. In terms of representative democracy as manifest in the UK in 2010, the idealised democracy can be understood as one in which the elected government ‘truly’ represents ‘the people’ and in which the electorate have a consistently meaningful and if necessary direct involvement in the process of policy formation and implementation. As discussed in Chapter 5 when the environmental conditions for memetic replication in the 2010 election were laid out, the reality of democracy as expressed through the formal election process did not inspire the rhetoric of ideal democracy. Even as the drama of the UK’s first really contested election of the 21st Century drew people to their television screens, smartphones and computer monitors to watch the leaders’ debates (and then to Facebook to comment upon them), trust in and enthusiasm for the political process and those involved in it remained low (Green, 2010, Cutts et al., 2010, Fielding, 2010, Pattie and Johnston, 2012).

In defence of the notion that the techniques of digital propaganda discussed in this study are bringing us closer to an ideal democracy (a claim made explicitly by Trippi (2004) in the context of American electoral politics), the most obvious characteristic of digital propaganda is the replication of memes by a long succession of people. Where such techniques are deployed by an elite group such as a political party, there is a need for an engaged and enthusiastic support base, as well as a resonance between the ideas expressed in those memes and the political environment in which they seek to replicate. Thus the digital epoch of propaganda could be seen as one in which the replication of ideas has evolved to a point in which it is advantageous to their replication that they be more

democratic, in the sense of requiring citizen participation rather than simply passive acquiescence. However this rosy picture is challenged by those such as Dean, who argues that participation in such forms of communication amounts to a “technological fetish” (2009:39) in which virtual participation in communications perceived as action, prevent energy being spent on more radical action towards social change, such as “occupying military bases, taking over the government or abandoning the Democratic Party and...revitalising the Greens or Socialists” (ibid:32-3). Other thinkers have also voiced fears that the democratic potential of replicating and producing political information has been exaggerated (Fuchs, 2012), with the primary function of such technologies in fact being to entertain (Fenton, 2012b) and that the extension of democratic dialogue provided by social media has simply been to a slightly broader elite, maintaining old patterns of disenfranchisement and exclusion (Davis, 2010).

Critical conceptions of participatory or citizen generated propaganda as ‘slacktivism’ or ‘clicktivism’ have drawn detractors from outside of the academy as well: Rintel (2013b) observes a variant on the ‘un-inspirational poster’⁵¹ meme which he refers to as ‘snarktivism’ that lambasts the laziness of those who feel that a political contribution can be limited to a Facebook update. It should be noted however that despite these objections, there is some evidence for a positive correlation between online discussion of politics and offline activism (Mercea, 2012). Wright’s (2012) suggestion that the utopian, revolutionary rhetoric which surrounded the early scholarly assessments of the Internet’s democratic potential have pervaded later, more sceptical conclusions through raised expectations is useful here. The implicit notion of democracy against which the current evolutionary epoch of propaganda is judged is the idealised notion; the Glittering Generality not the practice as realised in previous eras with different systems for the propagation of political ideas.

Whilst the model of assent and representation may fall short of the democratic ideal there is another, more pragmatic way to assess the democratic implications of digital propaganda; an evaluation of its effect on really existing democratic institutions with all their flaws and shortcomings. This is based less on abstract ideals of emancipation and more on relative factors such as participation, engagement and supporter enthusiasm as well as the power relations embedded in the communications structure of the campaign. In terms of the 2010 UK election these measures produced a mixed picture. The distribution of finance for example was not significantly altered by the potential for small online donations by individual citizens (Fisher, 2010b). Whilst all parties solicited funds on their webpage and both the Liberal Democrats and the already well-funded Conservatives, both promoted viral ‘give £1 today’ funding drives on their Facebook pages (see

⁵¹ A picture accompanied by a sarcastic caption, often in a black frame.

Appendix I), this was not to any great effect. Although individual donors still made up the majority of donations for the 2010 election, this was down to a small number of wealthy donors who gave disproportionately to the Conservative Party (ibid). On the other hand, some of the uses for that money, notably the expensive poster campaign which no other party could afford, were effectively undermined using free online image macros and social network distribution (See Chapter 7).

In a sense the failure of any party to really master the art of propagandising via the Internet meme can also be seen as a vindication of the democratic credentials of this form of propaganda: without substantial grassroots support it is observable, but underwhelming. However this does present a somewhat catch-22 situation

in terms of the potential of digital media to engage citizens (in particular the young) in the process of representative democracy; it cannot be used to create a grassroots following unless such a support base already exists. The answer to this conundrum could be

somewhat more optimistic in terms of both the ideal of

democracy and the more pragmatic interpretation of the term. Engagement comes from policy positions which resonate with the electorate, such as Howard Dean's anti-war stance (Trippi, 2004) and the Liberal Democrats position on tuition fees (see Appendix I for examples); although as this example suggests, there is nothing within this mode of communication to prevent the voodoo politics of campaigning on one issue then implementing diametrically opposite policies once in government. It is also not necessarily a bulwark against the replication of outright falsehood and misinformation. There is a theory advanced in favour of citizen journalism that crowd sourced material is automatically "self-correcting" (Jones and Salter, 2012:100), as initial posts are commented upon by informed readers. Andrew Chadwick (2011) presents some evidence towards this with respect to the Gordon Brown bullying scandal in 2010 whilst Zittrain (2008) argues this position with respect to *Wikipedia*. However, memes which are being constantly copied and reposted to different points on the Web need not evolve towards what is accurate, only towards that which resonates with those who copy them. In the case of the UK, where widespread ignorance

Doesn't make much sense, does it???

Homeless go without eating. Elderly go without needed medicines. Mentally ill go without treatment. Troops go without proper equipment. Veterans go without benefits that were promised. Yet we donate billions to other countries, and excessive immigration before helping our own first. 1% will re-post and 99% won't. Have the guts to re-post this. I KNOW I'm in the 1%.

Figure 18: Anti-Immigration Meme

on issues such as social security and immigration have been documented (Royal Statistical Society, 2013), there is the potential for certain subjects to spawn wildly misleading examples of citizen generated propaganda. Memes such as Figure 25 represent and perpetuate really existing fears and prejudices rather than challenging them, even where evidence (such as that provided by the Royal Statistical Society cited above), suggests those fears are based on misconceptions rather than facts.

It is not only policies but branded personalities which can be promoted in this way, as exemplified by Obama's notorious oratorical skill and to a lesser extent by the short lived 'Cleggmania' of the 2010 election. Once recruited by either policy or personality, digital grassroots activists become conduits for the propaganda of a party even with very minor, superficial actions such as 'liking' a Facebook status or sharing an online video. The distance between the paid, professional propagandists and the public is increased by the structure of delivery; when functioning ideally, the horizontal network provides insulating layers of ordinary citizens between the potentially less trustworthy party PR operatives and the wider electorate. This evolutionary trend is consistent with the increasing anti-politics sentiments expressed in the polling analysed in Chapter 5, the presence of already convinced friends and layman adds an air of innocence to a message which is often still co-ordinated by the same paid propagandists who dominated the 'broadcast' era of political communications (Norris, 2000). The extent to which this constitutes an anti-democratic degree of deception depends not only on the honesty of the message when compared to later actions in government, but also on the extent to which such hidden hierarchies themselves can be considered undemocratic.

Networks and hierarchies

The idealised notion of democracy replicates easily and implicitly alongside notions of equality and egalitarianism. However, the really existing mechanisms of representative democracy; the state, political parties, even the representative and the represented, are replete with structural hierarchies and inequalities in the distribution of power and of information. Whilst the ease with which information can be distributed digitally (including viral propagation) holds the potential for a greater equity (at least of information) between the ruled and the rulers, the Internet too contains a plethora of hidden hierarchies, often invisible to those who are simply using it to access online material.

Joss Hands (2011) observed this within the domain name structure of corporate social networking sites but it can also be seen to a lesser extent in the structure of the wider Internet. As Deibert observes in his study of state censorship by authoritarian regimes:

Most people assume that the Internet's vast infrastructure is an open, decentralized network of networks through which information flows freely...Whilst it is true that there is no single node through which all traffic passes on the Internet, and thus no form of centralized control, there are thousands of nodes that parse out and filter information and thus act as gateways. Each of these nodes and gateways...present opportunities for authorities to impose order on Internet traffic through some mechanism of filtering and surveillance. (2009:324)

Within the case study the use of such 'nodes and gateways' to exert hierarchical control over the replication of a message can be seen repeatedly but the relationship this had with democracy was considerably more complex. For example the requests for Facebook moderators to censor trolls and flammers, which it was argued represented a conflict between a traditional, hierarchical form of censorship and a differential form, enacted by the trolls themselves. The ethical position of the hierarchical censor was also further complicated because requests for censorship came from those being moderated, not from the overarching hierarchy of the party. The exercise of hierarchical power as a memetic selection pressure is also in evidence in the avocation of the use of 'editorial power' by Clifford Singer (2010b). Arguably the decision to select some of the satirical poster memes over others gave greater replicator power to those hosted on his site. He argued that the decision to exercise this power added a level of quality control to the chaos of crowd sourcing, without actively preventing the proliferation of those not selected for his site throughout the wider Web. Of course as Labour's mixed experience with their digital billboard competition demonstrated, if the use of editorial censorship as selection pressure is to be effective, it has to be exercised with skill.

The same pattern of partial hierarchy, partial equitable power distribution can be seen in the functioning of representative democracy itself, with hierarchical relationships sometimes necessary for the institutions of representative democracy to function effectively. This is why the Liberal Democrats defended the limitations on their acceptance of policy co-creation, arguing that to allow any citizen who visited their Web page to assist in the process of policy creation, bypassed internal democratic structures for the creation of policy which already existed within the party (Lilleker et al., 2010). It is also why David Plouffe noted that the Obama campaign was "not a democracy" (2009:319) in terms of its internal structure, even as it devolved much of its organisational responsibilities and associated powers to supporters and volunteers, power over policy and branding still remained at the top. In the context of the 2010 election this hybrid structure can be seen in certain aspects of each of the campaigns. The Conservatives used the rhetoric of 'people power' whilst essentially conducting a traditional top-down campaign, the Liberal Democrats inspired a higher degree of spontaneous supporter organisation than their rivals but failed to capitalise on it and Labour tried hard to emulate the US model of hybrid campaigning but without the crucial base

of support necessary to make it successful. As a consequence none of the parties managed to combine the right structural balance with a truly resonant message that enough supporters wished to replicate on their behalf.

This hybrid form of organisation in which crowd sourcing and grassroots organisation is allowed a degree of autonomy, but is ultimately beholden to a central authority in matters of both policy and overarching brand message, perfectly reflects the power relations detailed by Roach (2006) in his discussion of memetic brand generation. In the US especially there is some indication that a successful balance evolved over time, with the less coordinated Dean campaign, in which volunteers were arguably more autonomous (Trippi, 2004), giving way to a the more structured and hierarchical Obama campaign. Ironically it appears that the campaigns which are more closely organised in the 'ideal' democratic mode appear to be worse at winning elections within representative democracies. When viewed in this light it is easy to see campaigns such as Obama's as closer to astro-turf than 'true' grassroots activism, although when compared to what Norris (2000, 2004) called the 'Modern' election era, in which television was the pre-eminent medium, it has seen resurgence in the need for individual supporters and volunteers. This suggests that within the less exultant and more pragmatic measure of democracy, the hybrid campaign structure has notable benefits. However, such pragmatic analysis is based on the Schumpeterian definition of representative democracy and inter-party competition, Norris (2000:23) argues that this is a useful conception due to wide recognition and extensive cross cultural metrics which can measure participation this way, but also acknowledges the existence of alternative more direct conceptions of democracy which exist beyond the formal mechanisms of parties, elections and representation.

'Memetic' protest, direct democracy and citizen generated propaganda

Castells (2012) has argued that a wide range of revolutionary and protest movements, such as the Arab Spring, the Spanish M15 movement and the global Occupy Movement can be understood as functions of a society dominated by distributed, networked communications. This picture has been challenged both explicitly and implicitly by those who view such arguments as technocentric and shallow, ignoring or downplaying important factors such as political history and economic and social context (Fuchs, 2012, Curran et al., 2012). The memetic perspective, which argues for the necessity of appreciating the environmental context in which memes proliferate, may offer a compromise as well as an interesting perspective on movements which have been characterised as memetic (or mimetic) by both observers and participants (Castells, 2012, Peters, 2011) albeit from an a-theoretical perspective based on the pop-cultural understanding of the meme as horizontally communicated or 'viral' information.

The use of citizen generated propaganda by political parties has an ambiguous ethical dimension; the proliferation of ideas via citizens suggests a kind of assent and appreciation of ideas rather than their imposition, at least when compared to more traditional, top-down models of political communication. However the hierarchy of professional propagandists not only still exists within such a model, they are obscured by the participation of ordinary citizens just as Berneys (2006) envisioned the 'invisible government' of PR operatives back in the 1920s. However the conception of memetic organisation and communication put forward in the context of contemporary social movements is inextricably bound to a more idealistic form of direct democracy, and such movements have frequently resisted the very idea of hierarchical representation (Fenton, 2012a, Gerbaudo, 2012, Mason, 2013).

The casual association with movements as distinct as the Arab Spring and demonstrations in the UK against government austerity and corporate tax avoidance (Peters, 2011) has been criticised by those such as Christian Fuchs (2012) and Natalie Fenton (2012a). They have noted that, for the Arab Spring in particular, the countries affected tended to be disadvantaged by the digital divide, with access to the Internet at low levels even within the region, and digital communication more significant in terms of communication outside of the country, rather than within the movements themselves. For example, Fuchs notes that research conducted amongst Tahir Square activists put online communication behind face to face, telephone and television as significant news sources, and behind the telephone and face to face communication as organisational tools (2012:788-9). However it is possible to discern a common threads through these disparate movements, environmentally they share a collective frustration with the failures of neo-liberalism which is touted by Dean (2012), Curran et al (2012) and Fuchs (2012) as a significant factor which is consistently underplayed by a focus on technology. Memetically however it is the replication of protest actions and propaganda techniques such as the occupation of space which is most significant, especially as both Gerbaudo (2012) and Mason (2013) note that these techniques were specifically copied, rather than the product of convergent evolution, both within and between the protest movements which sprang up in 2011.

The role of propaganda in facilitating the proliferation of protest is acknowledged with unusual frankness by Paolo Gerbaudo in his examination of protest and digital media, where he compares the use of Social Networking Applications (SNAs) by activists with "Lenin's classic description of the Party newspaper as 'propagandist', 'agitator' and 'organiser' of collective action" (2012:4). There is also evidence of an appreciation amongst activists, not only of the need for communicative action, but also of the techniques of propaganda which are relevant to the current evolutionary epoch of

political campaigning. As noted with respect to the introduction of 'resonance' as a memetic concept, Castells' interview with Spanish activist Javier Torret included the observation that "for something to be viral online, for something to be mimetic, slogans have to resonate" (2012:120)⁵². Castells argues that the Spanish Indignados/Indignadas movement were especially successful at garnering popular support for their ideals and actions because they were able to capitalise on a resonance between their aims and ideals and popular feelings of discontent with the status quo. It is this attitude which Gerbaudo (2012) argues made this and other protest movements from 2011 populist, as opposed to the proud minoritarian rhetoric of earlier alter-globalisation movements.

The replication of slogans such as the 99% meme popularised by the Occupy movement in the US was not the only form of propaganda replicated by these movements. In keeping with Ellul's (1973) argument that propaganda is inextricably bound to action, the practice of occupying public space can also be seen as a propaganda technique, and one which was replicated within and between otherwise highly diverse populist movements, bounded by their distinct national politics and context. In the context of the Liberal Democrat flashmobs discussed in Chapter 8, it was argued that the organised collection of supporters in public space can be understood propagandistically in that it incorporates techniques such as Testimonial and Bandwagon, arguments which still hold true when such demonstrations are organised on behalf of a movement rather than a political party. Unlike the swiftly forgotten gatherings in support of the Liberal Democrats, Gerbaudo (2012) argues that the physical locations of protest such as Wall St, Tahir Square and Puerto del Sol became symbolic rallying points, those symbols became emissary memes for a particular type of resistance movement, tiny replicating ideas which functioned as propaganda by drawing in interested minds and facilitating the further proliferation of ideas and ideals associated with the protest movements.

One of the arguments made by Peters (2011) is that the protest movements which dominated 2011 can be understood memetically, not just in the sense that they were associated with the replication of pop-cultural memes, or that they actively embraced horizontally distributed communications structures, but that the movements themselves can be considered memes. He argues that UK Uncut's horizontal communications structure was (at least initially), combined with a horizontal power structure in which the movement grew through exponential replication and the imitation of ideas, arguments and protest tactics (in particular shutting down shops from companies accused of avoiding tax). This notion of horizontalism has already been challenged on similar grounds to the technocentricity which tends to replicate alongside it, i.e. that it is a popular discourse surrounding such movements but not representative of the evidence. Gerbaudo (2012) in particular raises

⁵² As noted in Chapter 1, this use of 'mimetic' in conjunction with the word 'viral' appears to be synonymous with memetic. The distinctions between the terms are discussed in Chapter 1 and do not apply in this instance.

concerns that the supposedly horizontal 'leaderless' occupy movement in fact contained the familiar hidden hierarchies characteristic of the virtually distributed network, in which communicative power rested with a comparatively small number of co-ordinators who themselves rejected the formal notion of leadership. UK Uncut is unusual in this context in that it was ultimately transformed into a more traditionally structured pressure group, a fact which led Peters (2011) to question whether they could still be considered an example of a 'memetic' movement. This notion of horizontalism being synonymous with memetics is derived from the pop-cultural interpretation of memetic theory and has also been repeatedly challenged within this thesis, which contends that all cultural replication can be understood memetically.

The notion of movements without leaders in which decisions are made and acted upon collectively is part of the argument for viewing such movements as examples of direct democracies. However, as with the examples cited in this study of the *mydavidcameron.com* posters and the hashtag <#nickcleggsfault>, the proliferation of memes throughout networks is facilitated not only by many, weakly connected individuals, but by a small number of highly connected ones (Shirky, 2008). Gerbaudo (2012) argues that the leadership of this leaderless movement consisted of highly engaged, time rich, technologically savvy and charismatic individuals, whose inequality of distribution, in particular within Facebook and Twitter, gave them a de facto co-ordination role. The presence of central, charismatic leader, as a convergent symbol providing memes with replicator power is a possible explanation for the greater success of digital campaigns in Presidential rather than Parliamentary systems as discussed in Chapter 5 (see Williamson et al., 2010). However, despite this similarity there are important distinctions in the way in which the protest and the election campaign function. The candidate in the election is not simply the facilitator of memetic replication and co-ordinator of message, the entire function of the electoral process is designed to elevate the candidate to a position of greater authority, by contrast the Facebook co-ordinators observed by Gerbaudo (2012) tended to exert less influence once the movement had coalesced into the physical occupation of space. Gerbaudo argues that the continuation of the kind of 'soft' leadership within the protest camps so emblematic of the 2011 protests was maintained on the ground through Twitter and through the economies of time, energy and experience, with those more accustomed to organisation and without conflicting responsibilities taking on co-ordination roles within the camps and communication roles with respect to the outside world.

The extent to which the existence of informal leadership structures within ostensibly leaderless movements is considered problematic from a democratic perspective is in part a pragmatic one, comparable to the same question, initially posed in relation for formal election campaigns earlier in

this chapter. In comparison to traditional structures of formal leadership through representation, movements such as Occupy have substituted a kind of communicative leadership through consensus based around access to and proficiency with particular kinds of media (Fenton, 2012a, Peters, 2011, Gerbaudo, 2012). In the same way the electoral campaign meme requires a form of collective resonance and affirmation for proliferation, so to do the 'leaders' identified in this form of anti-hierarchical, organisational structure. It was previously argued that the hidden role of professional propagandists within the digital election campaign, added an element of deception to the utilisation of such propaganda techniques within the Post Modern election campaign. Similar arguments can be made about the rhetorical dichotomy between the presence of unacknowledged leaders and the rhetoric of leaderlessness common to the 2011 protest movements. Dean's (2012) argument that the Occupy protesters were essentially performing the function of the revolutionary vanguard party in a previous century, and should therefore be more willing to engage with explicit systems of representation, seems unlikely to resonate with activists so committed to the promise of collective autonomy. From the anarchistic end of the spectrum, where anonymity has literally been raised as a symbolic figurehead by the Anonymous movement (Anonymous UK, 2013) the invisibility of the individual within these covert leadership roles has a positive rather than a deceptive role, providing a bulwark against the rise of personality cults around charismatic leaders.

Conclusion: A more democratic propaganda?

Ultimately, whilst the rhetoric of 'no-leaders' may be less than accurate, the protest movements of 2011 represent bold attempts to put the idealised form of democracy as direct and participatory into practice and to do this they relied heavily on a communication model which corresponds with the pop-cultural understanding of memetic communication. The similarities between their campaign methods and those of more traditional political campaigns were not simply a coincidental action or a convergent action resulting from the use of the same Social Networking Applications (SNAs). There is evidence of an explicit appreciation and understanding of digital propaganda techniques by activists, in particular the need to make slogans and messages resonate with public opinion in order to facilitate viral propagation and the notion that messages can be diffused through online social networks via 'copy me' style campaigns. The use of such techniques by movements which prided themselves on championing non-hierarchical, direct democracy rather than the representative structures associated with electoral democracy, could be seen as a vindication of claims by the likes of Trippi (2004) and Roach (2006) that the current evolutionary epoch of propaganda is more participatory and thus more democratic than that which went before.

A challenge to the notion of pop-culturally memetic propaganda as a more democratic evolutionary epoch comes in the form of the often unanticipated and in part unacknowledged tendency towards hidden hierarchy. This has been noted within the context of the 2010 election in regards to the distance it puts between citizens and the professional PR operatives employed by political parties. The existence of such hierarchies within the protest and revolutionary movements of 2011 has been explicitly linked to the power law relations inherent in distributed networks (Gerbaudo, 2012, Shirky, 2008), in which some more popular nodes within a distributed, or virtually distributed network, endow memes with a greater level of replicator power, resulting in the de facto creation of leaders or spokes-people. When viewed from a more pragmatic position rather than the exultant ideal of direct democracy, the presence of hierarchy need not necessarily be a hurdle to democracy; representative democracy for example is replete with hierarchical structures. However the potential deception inherent in the dichotomy between the appearance and rhetoric of horizontality and either covert public relations experts or 'soft' leaders, could be considered problematic even when considered in the context of representative democracy. However, it should be noted that some of the more anarchistic supporters of the Occupy movement believed that keeping 'soft' leaders anonymous had democratic benefits in that it offered a protection against the rise of personality cults surrounding specific individuals who rose above the crowd. It should also be remembered that a democratically validated meme, spread as a consequence of high participation, need not necessarily reflect truth or accuracy, they can also reflect widely held misconceptions provided such ideas resonate with a sufficient number of people.

Chapter Ten: Evolving Propaganda Analysis - Theory, Method and Practice

The aims of this research were not limited to the investigation of digital propaganda in the 2010 election. In addition to the empirical portion of the work, the intention was to begin the formulation of both a memetic theory of propaganda and a set of qualitative methodological tools with which propaganda could be analysed from a memetic perspective. These latter aims were intended to be applicable to other investigations with different focuses and other case studies from different times and places. This concluding chapter will examine these three aims in order to evaluate both the results of the study, and the effectiveness with which memetic theory was adapted to form a set of conceptual and methodological tools with which to examine digital propaganda. This will be followed by an appraisal of potential further research using the same tools; including the possibility of historical research into propaganda's evolution over the longer term and in light of its relevance to the 2011 protest movements discussed in Chapter 9, further contemporary studies from outside of the sphere of party politics. The final section will broaden this discussion, as well as revisiting some of the issues relating to democracy and ethical practice addressed in the previous chapter. In addition there are also implications for how and what students are taught about propaganda in disciplines such as politics, journalism, Media Studies and public relations.

Evolving propaganda theory

The memetic theory of propaganda has taken two disciplines: memetics and propaganda analysis, which have fallen out of favour within the academy in an attempt to demonstrate their contemporary relevance. As a theory of cultural evolution with its roots in sociobiology, memetics suffered within the humanities from association with biological determinism, and from the barely disguised feeling amongst scholars – notably from anthropology (see Sperber, 2000, Kuper, 2000 for examples of this attitude) – that it represented a condescending encroachment in their discipline by natural scientists with no grounding in the study of culture. Some of memetics most vocal adherents such as Susan Blackmore, whose 1999 publication *The Meme Machine* became a seminal text on the subject, have attempted to define memetics specifically as a new scientific discipline, as opposed to a theoretical paradigm, or set of conceptual lenses. This perspective may have inadvertently increased hostility to the memetic approach within the humanities because as David Hull pointed out, the level of proof required by the natural sciences is higher than that of the social sciences or humanities, and the level of proof which social scientists demanded of memetics was so high “that few, if any areas of science can possible [sic] meet them” (2000:48). The purpose of theory within

the humanities is not necessarily to form a singular unified theory which can explain all aspects of the social world, but to focus attention on specific aspects of that world. This is why feminism, Marxism, realism and pluralism can all have respectable places within the totality of scholarship. The perspective taken within this study has been that if memetics is treated as a theoretical paradigm, more akin to Marxism or Liberalism than biology or linguistics, it has the potential to provide highly useful conceptual tools with which to analyse a wide range of subjects – including political propaganda – without getting buried in ontological difficulties over issues such as the precise form and location of the meme and the nature of imitation. These questions are currently unanswerable, certainly from a political communications perspective, and have arguably distracted a promising discipline from more useful and interesting empirical work. The high standard of proof originally demanded by critics of memetics would require a massive interdisciplinary effort by anthropologists, neurologists, systems analysts, media and political communications scholars and historians, in order to unify only some of the myriad areas of research in which memetics could potentially be useful. Such an effort can never be undertaken unless scholars in each of these individual areas demonstrate that memetics can be usefully deployed to address research questions in each of their specific disciplines.

In contrast to memetics, the problem faced by propaganda analysis was not too much theorising but too little. The word ‘propaganda’ has become such a pejorative term that it tends to be adopted only by those such as Miller and Dinan (2008) or Herman and Chomsky (1988) and their later disciples (see for example Klaehn, 2005, Edwards and Cromwell, 2009), who are engaged in activism or critical scholarship. The work produced by such scholars is often meticulous in terms of its specific focus, but it lacks universality, depicting propaganda as a practice engaged in only by those they are critiquing and ignoring its benign or positive manifestations. By contrast the scholarship surrounding public relations seeks to distance itself from propaganda as a potentially embarrassing historical antecedent (see Moloney, 2006 for a full discussion of this issue). As discussed in Chapter 2, public relations is not the only phrase which has arisen in this manner; the military expression psychological operations, the scholastic political communication and the intelligence services ‘information systems’ can all be considered euphemisms for propaganda (Curtis, 2004). The reason that this study has sought to address propaganda using the original term was first out of a desire to avoid unnecessary obfuscation and secondly, because of the focus on propagation which is key to propaganda as viewed through memetic lenses.

The evolutionary view of propaganda developed using memetic theory helps to solve some of the definitional problems associated with both the manifold theories of propaganda and the myriad

euphemisms used to describe it. In addition to the embarrassment caused by propaganda's association with anti-democratic social manipulation, propaganda has frequently been defined by the techniques of public persuasion observed during its use. This has been the case as far back as Aristotle (2012) in the 4th Century BCE, through the early 20th Century in the work of Albert and Elizabeth Lee (1939) and into the 21st with scholars such as Nicholas J O'Shaughnessy (2004). The memetic theory of propaganda contends that such an approach is problematic because the techniques of propaganda evolve and thus cannot be considered static or durable enough to form the basis for a universal definition of the phenomena. Memetic theory allows us, not only to view the proliferation of ideas and texts as memes diffusing throughout the body politic, but to view the techniques of persuasion in the same light. The mechanisms which can be utilised by a wide variety of individuals and organisations to facilitate the propagation of their preferred ideas can also be imitated. This makes them memes in the academic sense and provides a solid theoretical foundation for the evolution of propaganda. Replication is the fundamental component of all evolutionary processes, as techniques of propaganda spread through different political and institutional environments they are copied, altered and added to; in other words they are subject to evolutionary change.

The common theme which runs through all these techniques and variations, and which therefore becomes the key definitional aspect of propaganda for memetic theory, is the notion of 'design for propagation'. Design in this context can be both intentional or the consequence of convergent political and economic forces. The notion of propaganda as an intentional force – either the intention to persuade or to deceive – is not universal within the literature. Structural propaganda, such as that described by Herman and Chomsky (1988) and Ellul (1973), include the macro analysis of propaganda as manifest throughout the whole of a society. Whilst this often includes the deliberate attempts by individuals and organisations to propagate the ideas and actions which most benefit them, taken on aggregate the picture is one of differential replication; a complex of socio-political factors within a given environment exert a selection pressure, favouring the proliferation of some memes over others. The memetic theory of propaganda is particularly suited to such approaches, but crucially it also holds the potential to unite this form of macro propaganda analysis with the more specific focus on propaganda from individual campaigns.

The capacity to unify ideas which appear initially to be discordant is a particular strength of this approach to propaganda analysis. In the current evolutionary epoch of propaganda, this includes the incorporation of both the academic and pop-cultural or 'Internet' meme into the analysis of the digital campaign. The expansion of access to the Web, especially in the developed world and

increased proliferation of Internet capable technologies have facilitated the formation of a family of techniques which have grown in popularity, especially in US political campaigns. This family is comprised of 'copy me' techniques: invitations and encouragements for those outside of a campaign to join in and spread that campaign's message. This includes the replication of recognisable Internet memes as well as the invitation to replicate other messages either deliberately or as the consequence of casual interaction with the campaign via social media. The spread of memes in this manner relies on an engaged and enthusiastic support base to distribute and hopefully create memes which further the message of a campaign. They also put a degree of distance between the general population and the PR agents and spin doctors employed by institutions who can inspire popular mistrust (Moloney, 2001). As such the implications for the ethical evaluation of propaganda are complex, suggesting the potential for both a greater degree of popular control and involvement in the creation and distribution of political messages, and a more insidious form of social coercion by those adept at mastering such techniques in the service of political elites.

Refining the methodological toolkit

The 'toolkit' approach to the memetic methodology used within this chapter provides a less systematic and replicable form of analysis than, for example, Thelwall's (2009) memetic approach to Webometric Analysis. However its advantage lies in its high degree of adaptability and its easy amalgamation with other forms of analysis. For example it was possible to use the methodological toolkit across all of the different sub-corpora detailed in Chapter 4 in addition to material gathered from news outlets and blog sites. It was also possible to combine this analysis with quantitative techniques such the time series information collected in relation to social networking. This section will evaluate each of the 'tools' originally outlined in Chapter 4, concluding with the introduction of a subsequent 'environmental' tool which has been developed throughout the study.

Identify the level of replication – is this a meme which is likely to replicate as a whole or a memeplex which contains and protects replicators that could spread independently? Could it do both?

The identification of the level of replication on which analysis is focused is particularly useful given that within both the academic and pop-cultural definitions of the meme, the size of the replicator is variable. Within this study it has been possible to address webpage URLs within a search engine, electoral slogans, individual posts on social media, videos, posters and Twitter hashtags as valid examples of the meme. These are in addition to the techniques of propaganda, which can also be treated as replicators and which thus form the basis for the evolutionary theory of propaganda. This variation in size is also accompanied by a variation in complexity, with some memes – notably the

mydavidcameron.com posters – including clear constituent memes, such as the image of Margaret Thatcher’s *Spitting Image*⁵³ puppet, which can replicate independently of the original meme.

This variety in terms of a meme’s size and complexity was dismissed by Blackmore (1999) as not a problem for memetic theory, given that the (academic) definition of the meme simply requires it to replicate as a coherent unit. The potential size of a meme is thus dependent on the quality of the mechanisms for replication, including the availability of digital technology which increases copy fidelity. This study has argued that the focus by memetic scholars on the kind of ontological questions such as ‘what exactly is a meme?’, ‘where is it?’ and ‘what size is it?’ have been problematic for research because prior to the switch in focus to the Internet meme, they tended to dominate discussion at the expense of empirical work. This tool allows for the focus of these issues to switch from theoretical to methodological, with the level of replication identified and judged by its utility with respect to the research being undertaken.

When analysing a memeplex, consider whether it could it be classed as a vehicle.

The issue of whether or not the genetic concept of the vehicle is appropriate in the case of memetic evolution remains a matter of debate within memetics as a discipline. However as with the question of the level of replication, altering the perspective on this issue so it is considered as a methodological rather than a theoretical or empirical question has been productive and useful. The concept of the vehicle in genetics is for the most part a synonym for the organism (there are exceptions, for example with eusocial creatures such as honeybees the vehicle can be seen to exist at the level of the swarm (Dawkins, 1999)). It describes the relationship between the replicator, which survives through (mostly) identical copies and is subject to evolutionary change and the vehicle, which protects such replicators and facilitates their replication, but does not itself replicate or evolve. This is a distinction which is at least in part connected to the phenotype/genotype divide which, as discussed in Chapter 1, is not entirely applicable in the case of cultural replicators.

As a methodological tool the notion of the vehicle has proved useful in the context of several different types of memetic construction, including complex and dynamic multimedia texts such as website and Facebook homepages, ideological networks such as Conservatism and institutional bodies, such as the political parties analysed in this study. What these memetic constructs have in common is a relatively unitary nature, the Conservative Party as an institution, the homepage of their website and Conservatism as an ideology with which someone may personally identify, are all “discrete enough to seem worth naming” (Dawkins, 1999:144). However, the party as an institution

⁵³ *Spitting Image* was a satirical television program featuring puppet versions of prominent political figures.

and the ideology are vast and complex, impossible to replicate as a coherent whole, and whilst this study has demonstrated that homepages from both websites and Facebook can be replicated, they fail to do so with a high or consistent degree of accuracy. The manner in which this category of memetic structure replicates is through the production of what have been referred to in this study as emissary memes, these are smaller, unitary replicators which draw in minds which are conducive to the replication of additional memes from within the original vehicle.

As a methodological tool, the concept of the vehicle provides a language with which to describe and analyse memetic constructs operating on a larger level than the individual meme and this is highly useful. However, the language of the vehicle has been adopted from genetics and from previous memetic literature for convenience and the analogy between genetic and memetic is not perfect. Within this study the vehicle-as-digital-space, e.g. using the vehicle concept to explore a Facebook page as a discrete and dynamic environment, is qualitatively different from the vehicle-as-social-structure which allows for a similar approach to be taken when addressing an entire institutional body, particularly when discussing issues of scale and the variety of mechanisms available for memetic transmission. It is possible that for a study which had a more institutional or ideological focus, clear additional nomenclature would have to be developed to insure that these concepts remained distinct. This could be easily incorporated into the memetic methodological toolkit if necessary when conducting further research.

In addition it is possible to address the individual as a vehicle, something which was commented upon in Chapter 1, which in this case study includes the individual propagandists, party supporters and page moderators, all of whom were discussed in the context of their role in facilitating the spread of digital propaganda. As an individual, whilst they may be a vehicle, cannot be considered a memeplex (although Blackmore (1999) contends that the sense of self specifically, can be analysed in precisely this manner) it might be useful to adapt the language used in this 'tool' in order to incorporate the individual and distinguish between the different categories of memetic vehicle.

Disaggregate the memeplex into its constituent alleles. Does the alteration of an allele change the meaning of the meme?

The practice of disaggregating a memeplex was initially envisaged as a complement to the 'level of replication' tool, with complex memeplexes (or vehicles in the 'digital space' sense) divided up in order to expose individual techniques of propaganda, emissary memes and other relevant replicators. However where this tool has in fact proved most useful is in the context of the pop-cultural or Internet meme. Specifically the kind which Shifman (2012) considered to be 'truly' memetic as opposed to viral, because they were characterised by change over time, not simply

widespread replication. In particular the notion of the memetic allele, which Distin (2005) has argued is a legitimate category for memetic study, proved especially useful.

It was argued within the literature review that with the possible exception of very basic symbols and phonemes, most memes can also be disaggregated into constituent parts which also have the potential for unitary replication. This was certainly the case for the *mydavidcameron.com* posters, which were created after the successful disaggregation of the initial Conservative posters allowed for the replacement of specific alleles such as the image or text. The alteration in these alleles and the subsequent humorous variations altered the propaganda function of the original meme creating counter-propaganda. The relevance to the issues of meaning and propaganda made this a useful methodological tool in the context of this study. However it is the demonstration of the relevance that the earlier memetic concept of the allele has to the more recent digital focus on Internet memes which may prove significant for further research; in particular studies which wish to address the 'cross breeding' of online culture, where recognised pop-cultural memes merge with each other (see Bauckhage et al., 2013) might find this tool especially useful.

Is this a 'copy the product', or 'copy the instructions' meme?

As with the vehicle tool, the use of this method has suggested the need for more specific categorisation with respect to instructional memes. Whilst the 'copy the product' meme is reasonably unambiguous and can be usefully implied to, for example, the replication of viral videos such as those from *WebCameron*, without the addition of any brand co-creation or supporter variation, 'copy the instructions' memes came in at least three distinct forms.

Blackmore's (1999) original description of this form of replicator was essentially schematic, it was a meme which could be copied as a unit but also set out the instructions for the production (and thus accurate replication) of a product. The example she uses is of a person making soup, it is possible to imitate 'making soup' as a meme, but without recipe the replication is likely to be inaccurate, the second soup will be different from the first. This is compared to a recipe with instructions for making the soup; this can not only be accurately copied more easily, but can also insure that the soup itself is faithfully reproduced. This form of 'copy the instructions' meme, in which the instructions are paired with a distinct 'copy the product' meme were in evidence within the case study. For example calls for Liberal Democrat supporters to congregate for a flashmob in support of their party. Both the instructions to assemble in a specific location and subsequent encouragements to wear the party colour yellow, were 'copy the instructions' memes, they replicated as instructions as well as allowing their 'copy the product' counterparts of assembly and dress code to be accurately replicated. This particular kind of 'copy the instructions' meme may be a useful analytical tool for subsequent

memetic analysis of online/offline protest movements of the kind described by Mason (2013), Gerbaudo (2012) and Castells (2012), given the relationship which Gerbaudo in particular observed between online instructions and offline actions.

There were in addition to this two other forms of 'copy the instructions' meme, both of which lacked the corresponding 'copy the product' counterpart. These were memes which had either an implicit or explicit message within them to further their own replication. The notion of a meme which includes instructions for its own replication is not a new one, although it was not previously categorised explicitly as a 'copy the instructions' meme. Dawkins (2006c) in fact cited this trend within religious memes specifically as a potential explanation for their epidemic spread, although other scholars such as Distin (2005) have argued that this is an overly simplistic perspective, which obscures potential advantages to health within some religious rituals and dietary laws. Within the context of this study the 'copy me' category of propaganda techniques frequently includes embedded instructions to share a specific meme such as a video or party manifesto with friends and family. In the soup example, the instructions and the product are two clearly distinct memes, albeit obviously related ones, by contrast the instructions in this instance are embedded directly within the product. Examples include asking people to share a video via Social Networking Applications (SNAs), which was a common occurrence during the Labour party's 'Word of Mouth' campaign.

The final variation of the 'copy the instructions' meme includes those with implicitly embedded instructions. The type of pop-cultural memes discussed in the previous section on disaggregation can be seen in this light. For example the *mydavidcameron.com* posters can be seen as containing implicit instructions for their own replication. Specific conjunctions of alleles such as the position, font and colour of the text in relation to the image, the colour of the background and the form of the phrasing – such as the call and response motif in the 'I've never voted Tory before but...' posters - form a set of implicit instructions for the production of variations on this meme. This is what gives rise to the kind of evolutionary change, amalgamation and re-appropriation which is common to pop-cultural memes (IMD, 2014, Bauckhage et al., 2013). The presence of a set of internal, implicit instructions within memes such as the *mydavidcameron.com* posters is demonstrated by the production of image macros which codify those instructions into an algorithm for ease of replication. However, as noted by Shifman (2012), even in situations where such macros do not exist, the replication of this form of meme is still in evidence. It could be argued that prior to the explicit codification of the instructions for replicating such a meme, those instructions do not in fact replicate. They are simply decoded independently from previous memes in the same way by multiple individuals. However, as has been argued within the literature review portion of this study,

undue focus on the precise nature of replication in this manner has been problematic within memetics in the past. By treating this issue as a methodological rather than empirical one it is possible to judge the concept on its utility with respect to memetic analysis and in the context of this case study, the notion of implicit instructions within pop-cultural memes has been of use. However, in cases in which this division is of more significance it might be necessary to draw a greater distinction between different kinds of instructional meme.

Take the meme's eye view. What opportunities for replication exist within this environment

The meme's eye view is a methodological tool which has been used by traditional memeticists such as Blackmore (2000) and also has a genetic counterpart in biology explored by Dawkins (2006b). The purpose of this methodological tool is to explore a memetic environment in terms of the opportunities it presents for replication. It has been useful within the case study as a means to analyse social media networks as memetic environments and when exploring the relationship between memes of party propaganda and the wider memetic environment of the body politic during the election. As a mechanism for exploring the memetic environment it is particularly useful when paired with the concept of resonance developed within this study, as the presence of other resonant memes arguably forms an opportunity for replication which is of particular significance when addressing propaganda. This is because for a meme to replicate successfully *as propaganda* it does not simply need to replicate, it needs to persuade and ideally to be incorporated into a person's self-identity (what Blackmore (1999) called the selfplex).

Dawkins (2006a, 2006b) repeatedly voiced frustration at the way in which his methodological approach to the replicator, in which genes (or memes) could be endowed with metaphorical agency in order to explore their opportunities for replication, was frequently misinterpreted by his readers. In order to avoid these difficulties, care has been taken within this study to minimise the use of potentially confusing terms such as 'selfish' which Dawkins later regretted using, and by repeatedly reminding readers that any agency attributed to a meme is purely metaphorical and for methodological purposes. In addition, in cases where a meme's 'selfishness' has been evident, such as an individual meme of propaganda's lack of loyalty to the vehicle which produced it, the analytical approach has been to explain this explicitly as a consequence of the meme's lack of agency - and in particular its lack of moral agency.

Whilst useful, the meme's eye view is limited as a means to explore certain kinds of memetic environment because it explores opportunities for replication only from the perspective of the individual replicator. Within the context of this study it has also been useful to take a broader

environmental perspective; this allows a researcher to compare the opportunities for replication presented to memes in different contexts and to address those environments from the perspective of meme producers such as Facebook moderators and contributors. The various categories of vehicle also constitute a legitimate construct which can be endowed with metaphorical agency in the same way as the meme. As already indicated the memetic/genetic analogy is not perfect in this instance but it is not dissimilar to viewing an environment from the perspective of an organism. These constructs can be seen as constituting specific environments which can be analysed internally from the meme's eye view as can their emissary memes. However taking the 'vehicle's eye view' also allows for the relationship between institutions and ideological constructs to be analysed on multiple levels.

It has been argued within the initial chapters of this study that the memetic environment and the meme exist in an interdependent, dichotomous relationship. The memes in an environment define the nature of that environment and form selection pressures which then influence which subsequent memes will replicate successfully. As a consequence the memetic methodological approach could benefit from a greater focus on methodological tools which prioritise environmental analysis. As memes only possess a metaphorical agency, it is irrelevant from the meme's eye view, whether a selection pressure comes from a deliberate attempt by an individual propagandist or an institution to shape that environment in their interests. However from the perspective of both propaganda analysis and a variety of memetic vehicles (i.e. individuals, institutions or digital environments), it may be crucial and it may influence the nature of the subsequent memes generated from those sources.

Identify the propaganda techniques used to facilitate memetic replication within the data corpus. Have they been replicated from elsewhere?

As this methodological tool is specifically intended to identify propaganda techniques it could be considered the most specific and thus least adaptable tool within the toolkit. However, given that the memetic conception of propaganda is of a universal set of mechanisms by which replicator power can be increased, the notion of identifying the presence of such techniques may be applicable outside the obvious political sphere. This is why the memetic approach to propaganda has stipulated that the concept is only truly useful in conjunction with a subject or ideology which is to be propagated; propaganda must be 'for' something. In this sense this technique could be used to investigate the promotion of a product or an individual blog or online forum for example, or the perpetuation of a particular set of ideas or values as well as the kind of obvious, deliberate political campaigning addressed within this case study. Given the level of media savvy which scholars such as

Castells (2012) have observed within contemporary protest movements, this too could be a useful area in which this tool could be deployed.

Within the context of this study the identification of techniques, especially the kind of ‘copy me’ techniques associated with US digital campaigning within the UK 2010 election has gone some way to vindicating the conception of propaganda as an evolutionary phenomenon. However, the nature of the data available and the inference of imitation from a combination of similarity of technique, shared personnel and indications within the literature might not be considered satisfactory evidence by some of the scholars who criticised early memetic work for its imprecision (see Aunger, 2000a). In order to pursue this line of study, and to apply this methodological tool with greater accuracy, it would be necessary to have comparative bodies of data demonstrating technique use in two different contexts as well as interview data specifically identifying techniques which were replicated.

Lessons from the 2010 election

An Internet election is not simply an election in which digital and online media are utilised effectively by party campaign strategists. It consists of a confluence of factors inside and outside of the campaigns run by the major parties which converge on a party or more typically a candidate - as Williamson et al (2010) note, such elections are more typical in presidential rather than parliamentary contexts. These include environmental factors such as a potential pool of tech savvy, time-rich volunteers, an environment in which there is enthusiasm for political ideas, financial resources and a popular, charismatic leader who can capitalise on these assets. They also include a willingness and capacity on behalf of the party or candidate to engage in a campaign with a hybrid style structure in which policy and brand identity are centrally coordinated, but more horizontally distributed than a traditional campaign. This approach is harder to control but more flexible and able to adapt to the specifics of a local environment. The 2010 campaign did not exhibit what Kathleen Barr (2009), referred to as the ‘perfect storm’ of the 2008 US Presidential campaign. Although many of those individual factors – both environmental and memetic - were present in the context of the UK 2010 general election, they were spread across the parties with each campaign having one or two aspects of the characteristic ‘Internet election’, rather than all of the factors converging on one leader or one party.

Labour

The Labour Party not only effectively replicated the kind of horizontal communication ‘copy me’ style digital strategy favoured in the US, they even employed some of the same people as the Obama campaign through the company Blue State Digital (2010). Their ‘Word of Mouth’ campaign

was predicated on the idea that the enthusiasm of supporters could replicate their policy messages to the wider voting public more effectively than traditional, more expensive strategies such as roadside billboards (Wintour, 2010b). They utilised the 'copy me' technique in a variety of ways; direct appeals to their supporters to spread their message, the consistent packaging of information with links and encouragements to replicate their memes through Social Networking Applications (SNAs). They even emulated the crowd sourcing policy of the satirical *mydavidcameron.com* and encouraged their supporters to upload digital billboard adverts supporting Labour's election bid (ibid). Whilst the campaign may have been the result of a relative reduction in campaign finance when compared to previous elections (Fisher, 2010b), this kind of digital campaign relies heavily on another resource and it was one which the Labour Party conspicuously lacked: credibility with an engaged and enthusiastic supporter base.

The lack of credibility – particularly on the part of Gordon Brown – with the general public also presented a serious problem for this, especially memetic, form of propaganda campaign (Pattie and Johnston, 2012, Davis, 2005, Rawnsley, 2010). The 'copy me' campaign works by getting a support base who are already engaged with a message and predisposed to accept the claims and arguments related to it, then persuading them to replicate those claims on behalf of an organisation, movement or individual (Roach, 2006). This creates a distance between the paid PR professionals who inspire cynicism in the general public and those outside of the supporter network who might be persuaded to join it. Supporters can adapt a message to specific environments and even craft new messages based on internal branding and policy strategies. As can be seen from engagement with Labour's Facebook wall, they lacked a significant number of committed, tech savvy individuals willing to propagate such messages, at least via social media. For those who did sign up for the 'Word of Mouth Campaign' the lack of popularity enjoyed by Labour in general and Gordon Brown in particular, made the environment in which they were in turn trying to replicate pro-Labour memes, less than resonant, arguably hindering their success.

The Liberal Democrats

Unlike Labour, The Liberal Democrats enjoyed an upswing in public support and enthusiasm during the campaign (Cutts et al., 2010). Even prior to the increase in engagement brought on by Nick Clegg's performance in the first leaders' debate, evidence discussed in Chapter 8 suggests that an active digital support base, manifest through engagement and discussion on the party's Facebook page was already present at the beginning of the short campaign. There is also evidence within the Liberal Democrat campaign of self-organisation and citizen generated propaganda, something which

did not occur to any noticeable extent for Labour, although they may have benefited indirectly from the citizen generated anti-Conservative propaganda from *mydavidcameron.com*.

What the Liberal Democrats lacked was a co-ordinated strategy for engaging with that support. This is evident on their Homepage in terms of their lack of capitalisation on the 'I agree with Nick' meme and in their dualistic attitude to digital campaigning in which they appear to see it as a lesser form of support than offline activism, to the extent that they missed obvious avenues to exploit the potential of supporter based viral communication. For example they did not include encouragements to link their manifesto or other campaign materials via Facebook, or provide easy access graphics for people's profile pictures.

Not only were they unsuccessful at utilising their online support base effectively, the analysis of their Facebook wall suggests they were not even able to manage the level of interest which the party received after the first leaders' debate. Specifically this page shows evidence of a mass removal of posts in response to 'trolling' by supporters of other parties, as well as the removal of their own supporters who claimed to have been goaded into breaking the page's moderation rules by 'trolls' and 'flamers'. The page also exhibited instances of 'citizen initiated censorship' in which participants actively requested that disruptive contributors be removed from the page and prohibited from posting. These difficulties were linked inextricably to the Liberal Democrats' relative lack of finance during the election as the party not only had considerably less money in comparison to both Labour and the Conservatives (Fisher, 2010b), but it also had to stretch its finances further due to the scarcity of safe Liberal Democrat seats. Whilst they engaged slightly more than their rivals with digital fundraising strategies this was not sufficient to compensate for their lack of big business, wealthy donor and union support.

The Conservatives

The Conservatives made up for tepid enthusiasm in terms of their public support by outstripping the other two parties financially by a considerable amount; they were the only party in 2010 which spent up to the proscribed limit on their campaign (Green, 2010, The Electoral Commission, 2011). This was not due to a digital funding strategy which no party managed to successfully monopolise, (although all parties did solicit donations from supporters), rather it was due to large sums of money presented by wealthy individuals and corporate donors (Fisher, 2010b). Although the digital campaign has been characterised within the literature and by campaign insiders as the low cost alternative to traditional campaigns (Williamson et al., 2010, Trippi, 2004, Roach, 2006), having substantial sums to spend on digital propaganda presented some advantages for the Conservatives.

This is in keeping with older literature on US campaigning in which wealthier candidates were seen as more likely to spend money on their digital campaigns as they did not need to prioritise as much for more traditional approaches and could afford to risk less tried and tested strategies (D'Alessio, 2000). As a consequence of their largess the lack of professional design and development work exhibited in the Liberal Democrat campaign was reversed in the Conservative case with a well-designed website and a larger number of dedicated, paid staff. They were also more able to engage in paid digital advertising including the purchase of Google's sponsored links, initiating a brief 'ad war' with Labour from which the Liberal Democrats were notably excluded (Cellan-Jones, 2010a, Williamson et al., 2010). Whilst the Conservative campaign did include extensive social media use, generating a reasonable response on Facebook and a high degree of interest on YouTube, their campaign can be seen as sitting on the more hierarchical end of the hybrid spectrum of campaign communication. Their requests for support tended to be more prescriptive than Labour's, their supporter's on Facebook more reactive and although they did inspire some citizen generated propaganda, this included considerable material from detractors such as the posters at *mydavidcameron.com*, including criticism of their superficiality related directly to their association with public relations.

The future of Propaganda Analysis

Despite the lack of convergence on one campaign, there are indications within this study that digital propaganda techniques were being replicated from the USA in the 2010 UK election, supporting the foundational notion of the evolutionary theory of propaganda. However the provision of support for the basic building blocks of the theory would benefit from additional research. If the memetic approach can truly be applied to all forms of propaganda across different times, places and institutions it will require studies which go beyond single case studies and state based actors. In addition the case study also exposed some interesting and unanticipated phenomena such as the presence of citizen initiated censorship in response to trolling on party Facebook pages and it would be expected that further discoveries of this kind would be likely to stem from additional research covering other times, places and institutional contexts. The notion of using the memetic theory of propaganda to undertake genealogical, historical research into the evolution and development of propaganda over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries (and possibly much further back), is another potentially fruitful avenue for research. However there are also manifold possibilities in more contemporary political environments.

Further analysis of the Arab Spring and Occupy movements could be a productive area of research. In particular this could expand on one of the principal advantages of the memetic approach when

compared to more traditional understandings of propaganda – the notion that propaganda as a mode of communication applies not only to powerful and manipulative elites, but to any groups engaged in the spread of ideas. In addition the relevance of pop-cultural and Internet memes to these movements have already been noted by a variety of scholars. Studies such as the research conducted by Manuel Castells (2012) and Paolo Gerbaudo (2012) have indicated a high level of appreciation for the kind of ‘copy me’ techniques described in this study by participants across this disparate selection of resistance movements. Whilst Castells in particular has been criticised for taking an a-theoretical, utopian and technocentric approach to these movements (Fuchs, 2012, Curran et al., 2012, see Dean, 2009 for similar criticisms of his earlier work), the memetic approach not only provides a strong theoretical base for the analysis of communication by such groups, it also places the technology of communication alongside other social and political factors which form the environment of replication, mitigating against technocentricity. As these potential developments indicate, the possibility of a more democratic propaganda under the current evolutionary epoch should not be assumed based on the presence of relatively horizontal communications networks. Any evolutionary theory must be non-deterministic in that the potential evolutionary strategies in any given situation are manifold and not easily predictable, as Dennett frequently expresses in his reiteration of Orgel’s second rule “evolution is cleverer than you are” (Moreno, 2007). The case of the 2010 election also highlighted the importance of name recognition and financial capital as positive resources for the proliferation of information. Elite structures, including both traditional political actors and private enterprise have the advantage of money, and the associated advantage of individual working hours, when it comes to distributing ideas horizontally, just as they do when attempting to access the ever present and still highly influential broadcast and print media. This corresponds with the presence of submerged hierarchies within distributed networks which run counter to some of the more egalitarian ideas associated with propaganda which has been digitally distributed.

This study has consistently argued for greater academic appreciation of propaganda, further research into the subject is certainly necessary if it is to be understood in its contemporary form (or indeed as a historical evolutionary process). The traditional understanding of propaganda as simply a manipulative or deceptive form of communication is limited to only a tiny portion of the information which can be understood by the term, if the of the definition is shifted back to the original focus on the propagation of information which can be traced back to its origins within the 17th Century Catholic church (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1991). The memetic approach takes the focus on propagation and combines it with an appreciation of evolutionary principles in order to explore the ways in which propaganda has changed in response to its environment. The definition of

propaganda as deceptive communication may suffice for an individual research project which focuses on a specific instance or pattern of deceptive communication but it cannot unify that understanding of propaganda with the use similar communication techniques for benign or positive purposes. The memetic theory of propaganda has also been able to combine the understandings of propaganda put forth by a variety of thinkers from critical scholars such as Herman and Chomsky (1988), public relations scholars such as Moloney (2006) and propaganda theorists such as Ellul (1973) and O'Shaughnessy (2006) and demonstrate an underlying consistency in what appeared initially to be a chaotic and fractured discipline. These scholars do not all agree on the relationship between propaganda and deception, but the theme of propagation is universally present throughout the discipline. What memetics provides is a theoretical model which establishes that the simple fact of propagation can itself explain the manifold variations of propaganda in practice and demonstrate that the individual techniques of propaganda, whilst important to understanding specific instances of the phenomena, are themselves liable to alter in response to their environment and to change over time.

The wider benefits of this understanding can only be realised through public education about propaganda, including its potential for use by citizens and its potential for social manipulation and public deception. In the early part of the 20th Century when the Institute for propaganda analysis was still active, it sought to present its findings in a way which was rigorous, but also accessible and comprehensible to the wider population. This extended beyond the need for straightforward rather than overly verbose or jargonistic language. It included workshops within local communities and the production of material aimed at high school students (Sproule, 1987). This latter notion in particular, where the young are informed about the nature, potential and dangers of propaganda, is particularly salient in terms of the current epoch of propaganda's evolution. The necessary ingredient for a successful propaganda campaign, in the style of the election campaigns studied in this research project is an active support base, and where it has worked successfully in the US, this base has consisted largely of young, politically and technologically engaged citizens. Ensuring that young people understand the nature of propaganda and how it can be deployed will give them the tools with which to engage in mass political dialogue, not only on behalf of traditional party politics but also on behalf of more diverse ideological movements and single issue campaigns. It may also provide an additional level of what Blackmore called the "meme-immunological system" (1999:19), and Edward Bernays (2006) called 'sales resistance' which will allow them to resist the more cynical deployment of propaganda for duplicitous purposes.

Glossary

ACADEMIC MEME *Used to distinguish the 'meme' proper from the pop-cultural and Internet variations (see Meme, Pop-Cultural Meme, Internet Meme).*

ACT *The Liberal Democrat's internal social network.*

AGENCY *The capacity commit intentional acts.*

ALLELE *1. (Genetics) The substitute gene which could theoretically occupy a specific locus on a chromosome and thus increases the probability of the organism exhibiting a different set of phenotypic characteristics. 2. (Memetics) A meme which forms a logical substitution for another meme, potentially altering the form or meaning of the memplex into which the original meme was embedded.*

AMERICANISATION *The process whereby a country or institution comes to resemble the United States of America. Typically used to describe moves towards Presidentialism by the executive branch in a parliamentary system.*

ANTHROPOLOGY *The study of human culture and ancestral development.*

ARAB SPRING *The series of protests and revolutions which took place throughout the Middle East and North Africa, in particular during 2011.*

ARMS RACE *An escalating competition with no specified endpoint or goal (see also red queen process).*

ARTIFACT *1. Any object created by human beings. 2. A physical representation of a meme.*

ASTRO-TURF *Activism which appears to be spontaneous and bottom-up but which is in fact organised and funded by a powerful institution or individual.*

BANDWAGON *Gaining support by referencing something or someone's already existing popularity (real or imagined).*

BCE *Before Common Era.*

BIOLOGICAL DETERMINISM *The theory that genetic factors have primacy over environmental or social ones in determining the nature and behaviour of a species or organism (see vulgar sociobiology).*

BIOSPHERE *The part of the Earth and its atmosphere in which organisms can survive.*

BLOG *An abbreviation of 'weblog' a series of online articles presented in chronological order from newest to oldest.*

BRAND CO-CREATION 1. *The mutual production of brand messages between a producer (or their marketing staff) and their consumers.* 2. *The mutual production of brand messages between a party or politician and their supporters.*

BROADCAST AUDIENCE RESEARCH BOARD (BARB) *A not for profit company which measures the industry standard television ratings in the UK.*

BUZZ 1. *Gossip.* 2. *Word of mouth marketing.*

CENSORSHIP *Inhibiting the replication of specific memes.*

CENTRAL PROCESSING *A state of high concentration in which a person carefully scrutinises incoming information.*

CHANCELOER OF THE EXCHQUER *The financial leader of the UK's executive branch and minister in charge of the UK Treasury Department.*

CHROMOSOME *A structure found in living cells which contains the majority of the hereditary genetic information within the organism.*

CHURNALISM *Nick Davies term for the high-speed production of news, often including recycled press releases which are reprinted without sufficient validation.*

CITIZEN GENERATED PROPAGANDA *Propaganda produced by citizens rather than professional propagandists or political operatives.*

CITIZEN JOURNALISM *Online journalism typically undertaken by members of the public with little or no formal training and no press credentials.*

CLAP TRAP *A formulation of words designed to elicit applause.*

CLICKTIVISM *Low effort online campaigning (see slactivism).*

CO-ADAPTED MEME COMPLEX *(see memeplex).*

CONTAGION *The most simplistic form of copying in which reflexive actions such as yawning or laughing are repeated involuntarily. Examples from the animal kingdom include the spread of warning calls when an approaching danger is spotted.*

COPY ME *A family of digital propaganda techniques which attempt to persuade members of the public to produce and replicate memes for an individual, institution, ideology or cause.*

COPY THE INSTRUCTIONS MEME 1. *A meme which contains instructions for the creation or replications of a secondary 'product' meme.* 2. *A meme which contains implicit or explicit instructions for its own replication.*

COPY THE PRODUCT MEME *A meme copied directly from an action, text or object without implicit or explicit instructions.*

COUNTER PROPAGANDA *Propaganda launched in response to or as a means of disrupting contrary propaganda which has already begun to replicate.*

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA) *A family of qualitative analytical techniques which focus on the analysis of deeper meanings within text.*

CROWD SOURCING *To obtain ideas from the general public, often via online media.*

CUMULATIVE SELECTION *The retention of alterations and adaptations from the previous generation of naturally selected changes. This explains how evolutionary processes can produce complexity from simplicity.*

CUT AND PASTE *To remove (or sometimes copy) text from one digital location and place it in another.*

CYBER CAMPAIGN *A now somewhat archaic term for the aspects of a publicity or election campaigning conducted using the Web or the Internet.*

CYBER CYNICS *Theorists who believe that the Internet and related technologies will simply be incorporated into the existing social framework without producing any radical change for the better (see also cyber realists).*

CYBER REALISTS *(See cyber cynics).*

CYBER UTOPIANS *Theorists who believe that the Internet and related technologies have the capacity to radically transform society for the better.*

DARWINIAN THEORY *Evolutionary theory stemming from the work of the 19th Century naturalist Charles Darwin.*

DEOXYRIBONUCLEIC ACID (DNA) *The molecule which encodes instructions for the development of living organisms.*

DIALECTICAL *1. Two opposing or antithetical concepts. 2. Two concepts which exist in a relationship of mutual definition and creation.*

DIFFERENTIAL CENSORSHIP *Where memetic replication is inhibited, not by a central authority (as with traditional or 'top-down' censorship), but by the successful proliferation of a large number of contrary memes.*

DIFFERENTIAL REPLICATION *The different rates of success with which memes replicate.*

DIFFUSIONIST SCHOOL *An anthropological perspective which concerns itself with the spread of social practices across and between cultures.*

DIGITAL DIVIDE *The difference in access to digital communications tools such as the Internet and the Web across national and demographic groups.*

DIRECT DEMOCRACY *Democratic system where stakeholders make active decisions about how they are governed.*

DISTRIBUTED NETWORK *A network of networks with no central hub.*

DMU *De Montfort University.*

ECOSYSTEM 1. *(Biology)* A complex system of interaction between an environment and the organisms which inhabit it. 2. *(General use)* Any complex system.

EMISSARY MEME A meme which replicates as an emissary for a larger memplex, paving the way for further replication by other memes within that memplex.

EPIDEMIOLOGY 1. *The area of medicine that deals with the spread of disease.* 2. *The pattern of spread characteristic of the proliferation of disease throughout a population.*

EPIGENETICS *Hereditary traits which are non-genetic in origin.*

EVOLUTION 1. *Change through natural selection. (see cumulative selection, evolutionary algorithm, methodical selection, natural selection, punctuated evolution, unconscious selection).* 2. *Gradual change over time.*

EVOLUTIONARY ALGORITHM A phrase used by Daniel Dennett to describe the rules (replication, variation and competition) underpinning natural selection.

EXTENDED PHENOTYPE *The alterations in the surrounding environment - such as the construction of beaver dams - which result from biological evolution and alter the environment in which further evolution takes place, but which exist outside of, and may survive longer than, the organism through which the genes are replicated.*

FACEBOOK A prominent Social Networking Application which allows people and organisations to share links, text and online video.

FACEBOOK FAN A now defunct term for a person who has connected an organisation's Facebook page to their network.

FACEBOOK FRIEND *The name given to two individuals connected via the Facebook network. They may or may not be 'friends' in the general sense of the word.*

FACEBOOK WALL *The Facebook homepage for an individual or organisation.*

FINANCIAL SERVICES AUTHORITY (FSA) A UK financial regulatory organisation.

FLAMING *Hostile or aggressive posts in an online forum deliberately designed to antagonise.*

FLASHMOB *The semi-spontaneous gathering of a group in a public place in response to the viral replication of basic instructions (time, place, reason) on the Internet.*

FLICKR *An online resource for sharing images, especially photographs.*

FRACKING *Fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, is a process for extracting shale gas by pumping a high pressure liquid into the ground in order to fracture the rock so that the gas can be extracted.*

GENE *The unitary replicator which forms the basis for biological evolution.*

GLITTERING GENERALITY *Giving something a good name to make the audience support it.*

GODWIN'S LAW *The notion that any online discussion will eventually result in a reference to Hitler or the Nazis, at which point rational debate is said to have ceased. Godwin's Law is one of the oldest recognised Internet memes dating back to Usenet forums in the early 1990s.*

GOOD TRICK *Daniel Dennett's phrase for a design choice which facilitates effective replication and is such a simple adaptation that it can be implemented many times by convergent evolution without necessitating replication.*

GOOGLE *A search engine providing a publically accessible means to find online content. It presents users with a list of websites based on a supplied word or phrase.*

GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN *A political campaign which is orchestrated by members of the public rather than an established political elite or body.*

GREENWASHING *The practice of adopting a green aesthetic or rhetoric, or of implementing small but well publicised environmental practices in order to give the illusion of a true commitment to environmentalist principals.*

GRUNDIAN PARADIGM *A theoretical model from the study of public relations which argues for honesty, integrity and reciprocal communication between the public and PR professionals.*

HASHTAG *The hashtag in this study refers specifically to the practice of adding the symbol '#' to the beginning of a word or phrase in order to facilitate communication on Twitter.*

HOMEPAGE *Typically the first page of a website which contains links to more detailed or specific content within the larger site as well as drawing visitors' attention to new material. Throughout this thesis 'homepage' is typically used in relation to websites rather than social media pages although it is also used occasionally in reference to the parties' Facebook walls. (See web site, web page, Facebook wall).*

HORIZONTAL *A process of communication in which peers communicate with each other, as opposed to only receiving information via a shared hierarchical distributor of information.*

I-CULTURE *Cloak's term for the meme within the brain.*

ICT *Information communications technology.*

INSTITUTE FOR PROPAGANDA ANALYSIS *A US scholarly institute from the early part of the 20th Century dedicated to analysing and raising public awareness of propaganda.*

INSTITUTIONAL MEMEPLEX *A memetic interpretation of an institutional body which characterises it as a vast collection of interacting memes comprising a discrete ecosystem and which replicates principally through the production of 'emissary memes' rather than replicating as a coherent whole.*

INTERACTIVITY *The provision of online materials e.g. tools, forums or widgets which request or encourage contributions from users.*

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND *An international organisation consisting of 188 member nations which provides economic advice and analysis as well as loans to countries in economic crisis.*

INTERNET MEME *A virally replicating piece of online data identifiably by its success at digital replication. Often characterised by peripheral alterations around a central theme or set of implicit rules for its replication.*

INTERPRETIVISM *A constructivist ontology which argues that reality is formed by our interpretation of it.*

INVISIBLE GOVERNMENT *A phrase Edward Berneys used to describe the power of behind the scenes propagandistic coercion.*

IP ADDRESS *Internet Protocol Address - an identification number used by computers to communicate over the Internet.*

IPSOS-MORI *A well-known market research company.*

JAVASCRIPT *A programing language that allows for interactive features to be added to a webpage and updated in real time.*

LAMARKIANISM *A theory proposed by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck that hereditary characteristics could be acquired during an organisation's lifespan.*

LEADERS' DEBATES *The televised debates held between the leaders of the three main parties during the 2010 election (see also Televised Debates).*

LIBERATION PROPAGANDA *A positive form of propaganda aimed at galvanising a population against an aggressive force.*

LONG CAMPAIGN *The period of unofficial campaigning prior to the official election announcement.*

LOWER QUARTILE *The bottom 25% of a dataset.*

M15 *A protest movement in Spain against austerity which included the occupation of Puerto del Sol also referred to as the indignados/indignadas movement.*

M-CULTURE *Cloak's term for the meme as expressed outside of the brain, for example in objects or actions.*

MACRO *1. A computer program which takes a simple instruction and uses that input to automatically perform a series of more complex functions. 2. On a large scale or at wider level.*

MEDIA DISCOURSE GROUP *A network of Media Discourse scholars from multiple universities.*

MEME-POOL *An environment consisting of many memes which may compete or combine with any specific meme being subject to analysis.*

MEME *A replicating unit of culture. (See also, academic meme, Internet meme and pop-cultural meme).*

MEMEPLEX *A group of mutually reinforcing memes which may replicate alongside one another (see co-existing meme complex).*

MEMES OF PROPAGANDA *Memes containing techniques designed to increase their replicator power.*

MEMETIC DRIVING *The theory put forward by Susan Blackmore that memetic evolution can and has influenced genetic evolution in human beings and their hominid ancestors.*

MEMETIC ENVIRONMENT *A cultural environment with a specific set of selection pressures which influence which memes may replicate successfully within it (See meme-pool).*

METHODOCAL SELECTION *Natural selection in which human desires, goals and/or intentions act as a selection pressure. Examples include cross breeding plants and animals to produce organisms with desired characteristics and the design of deliberately orchestrated propaganda campaigns.*

METHODOLOGICAL TOOLKIT *A series of interchangeable analytical/methodological 'tools' for the qualitative analysis of data.*

MIMETICS *A broad discipline which includes the study of imitation (including imitation from and within nature) and internal representation of ideas to the self.*

MIND VIRUS 1. *A synonym for meme. 2. A destructive meme which can harm those who receive and replicate it or cause harm through its replication.*

MODERN CAMPAIGN *Pippa Norris' term for the mid to late 20th Century era of campaigning characterised by a high level of PR involvement and low levels of citizen engagement. Mediation was principally through television.*

MOSAIC *A database of information which by 2010 was sophisticated enough to classify households and even individual voters by demographic factors and consumer preferences. This data could then be combined with information from door to door canvassing and used to target swing voters in key constituencies.*

MP *Member of Parliament.*

MYTH *A widely held belief or narrative, often untrue.*

NAME CALLING *Giving something a bad name to turn the audience against it.*

NATURAL SELECTION *A process whereby replicators best suited for survival in a given environment proliferate more successfully than those which are less well adapted.*

NEO-LIBERAL *An ideological position characterised by a belief in the primacy of the free market.*

NHS *National Health Service, the UK's publically owned nationalised health service.*

NON-PARAMETRIC DATA *Data which is not distributed along a 'normal' (i.e. low, high, low) distribution curve.*

NUS *The National Union of Students or Student's Union.*

OBAMA FOR AMERICA (OFA) *The official name of Barack Obama's presidential campaign.*

OBJECTIVIST *A philosophical position which contends that the world exists as a real and independent construct which can be objectively investigated - as opposed to a social construction.*

OCCUPY *A global series of protests against the excesses of corporate capitalism characterised by claims of leaderlessness, the occupation of public space and online organisation and communication.*

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS (Ofcom) *The UK's media regulator.*

ONTOLOGY *Ontology is here defined using Hay's description of it as relating to "being, to what is, what exists" (2002:61).*

PDF *Portable Document Format - allows for an electronic version of text and images resembling a printed document.*

PEER TO PEER *A means of two-way or horizontal communication within a peer group, as opposed one way communication from a leader to followers.*

PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT *A euphemism for propaganda often used in the commercial sector.*

PERIPHERAL PROCESSING *A state of low concentration in which information is imperfectly scrutinised by the individual receiving it.*

PERSUASIVE CHAIN *A process of reasoning and argumentation that evolves as more people are persuaded of an idea. The 'chain' refers to the chain of people involved in spreading an idea or argument, each of whom may contribute additions and alterations to the previous argument as they pass it on.*

PHENOTYPE *A physical or behavioural characteristics made more likely as the consequence of the presence of a specific gene on a specific locus of a chromosome.*

PLAIN FOLKS *Making the audience feel the speaker is an ordinary person rather than a member of an elite.*

POP-CULTURAL MEME *A broader category than the Internet meme which includes offline manifestations of viral cultural material. Like the Internet meme (and unlike the academic meme) a pop-cultural meme can be identified by its success as a replicator.*

POSITIVIST *1. A philosophy which considers that truth can be demonstrated through logic or through mathematical proof. 2. A philosophical position which attempts to achieve the replicability, reliability and predictive capacity of the natural sciences within the social sciences often by emulating natural science methodological practices.*

POST-MODERN CAMPAIGN *Pippa Norris' term for the current era of political communications in which professional PR operatives have reached a level of importance which is on a par with elected politicians and which has enjoyed a slight resurgence of grassroots participation.*

POST-POSITIVE *A tempered form of positivism which acknowledges the existence of a really existing objective reality, but argues that our ability to analyse and interpret it is imperfect and incomplete.*

PRE-MODERN *Pippa Norris' term for the epoch of campaigning prior to the widespread availability of television. This era was characterised by low levels of professional PR use and widespread party participation/loyalty. It was mediated principally by print media and radio.*

PRE-PROPAGANDA *(See Sociological Propaganda).*

PRESIDENTIALISM *Characteristic of a president or presidential system, e.g. a strong focus on a party leader and their personality.*

PROPAGANDA *1. A system or technique for the propagation of ideas and/or actions (see also structural propaganda, pre-propaganda and propaganda technique). 2. A meme which has been designed to increase its replicator power (see also meme of propaganda).*

PROPAGANDA ANALYSIS *A discipline popular in the United States in the inter-war period pioneered by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis which was dedicated to both the analysis of propaganda and to raising public awareness of its use by elite groups.*

PROPAGANDA MODEL *Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's model for explaining structural bias within the commercial news media.*

PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES *Alterations to the form of a meme which are designed to increase its replicator power.*

PROPAGANDIST *A professional who designs memes for propagation, especially memes which are intended to also act as emissaries for a larger memplex. They may also attempt to exercise selection pressures which determine which memes are more able to replicate.*

PROSPECTIVE PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATE (PPC) *A person who is expected to run for election for a specific party.*

PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS *Propaganda typically targeted at opponents during war.*

PUBLIC RELATIONS (PR) *1. A synonym for propaganda invented in the 1920s in order to make it more acceptable to the American public when it was commercialised. 2. Strategic commercial propaganda (as opposed to advertising or marketing which is direct and/or tactical).*

PUNCTUATED EVOLUTION *Gradual change interspersed with periods of extremely rapid change.*

QUALITATIVE *A methodological approach which prioritises the deep analysis of smaller amounts of data, typically focusing on exploring context, subtext and other forms of hidden or implicit meaning.*

QUANTITATIVE *A methodological approach which prioritises statistical analysis and numerical data.*

RE-CREATION *1. Within the memetic literature is used to refer to the act of creating something which has already been created without imitating the original. 2. In the context especially of Internet memes and viral video, re-creation is to reproduce a meme in its entirety, for example by casting new actors in the original roles, in order to insert (often humorous) variations on the original theme. This is as opposed to simply producing a perfectly accurate digital copy by embedding it in a separate website.*

RED QUEEN PROCESS *From the book Alice Through the Looking Glass, referring to a process in which no-one is winning because everyone has to keep running simply to keep pace with everyone else.*

REPLICATOR *A self-replicating unit of information.*

REPLICATOR POWER *1. Contagious popularity. 2. The capacity to increase a meme's ability to replicate.*

REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY *Democratic system based on elected delegates which govern as representatives of a given constituency.*

RESONANCE *1. Vibrating with. 2. A quality possessed by a meme when it is in concordance with an environment or with another meme, facilitating its replication.*

RHETORIC *Dramatic or bombastic language.*

SALES RESISTANCE *A phrase used by Edward Berneys to describe people's resistance to explicit promotional or persuasion activities.*

SATIRE TRICK *The use of satire to replicate a meme in the mind of someone who would otherwise be hostile to it.*

SCHEMATIC *1. A diagram which represents a complex system simply using abstract symbols. 2. Contains instructions for the construction or replication of a meme.*

SCHUMPETERIAN DEMOCRACY *System of representative democracy based on electoral competition between parties and/or candidates.*

SEARCH ENGINE *A piece of software which allows people to search for online information.*

SELFPLEX *Susan Blackmore's term for the memetically constructed sense of self, including a person's likes and dislikes and their political opinions and loyalties.*

SEMIOTICS *The study of symbols.*

SHADOW CABINET *The prefix shadow is given to the British opposition cabinet and the specific positions within it e.g. Shadow Chancellor.*

SHORT CAMPAIGN *The period of intense campaigning between the date the election is called and polling day.*

SHOVELWARE *Material which is copied in its entirety from one place (usually offline) to another (usually online).*

SLACTIVISM *A term for half-hearted online activism which is limited to petition signing or 'liking' something on Facebook and which some have argued, distracts from more serious political engagement (see clicktivism).*

SMP *Scottish Member of Parliament.*

SNARKTIVISM *A digital practice of lampooning those whose political interaction is limited to superficial online participation.*

SNOWBALLING *Contacting a group of people each of whom subsequently contacts another group of people.*

SOCIAL LEARNING *The second most complex form of imitation, this involves the learned replication of an action which could be performed instinctively in a specific context. An example would be the phenomenon whereby blue tits in the UK took to pecking the tops of milk bottles in order to drink the cream inside. Pecking is an instinctive action for most birds, social learning allowed them to imitate other birds that were specifically pecking milk bottles and thus found a source of food.*

SOCIAL NETWORKING APPLICATION (SNA) *Online programs which facilitate peer to peer communication. The use of the word 'application' rather than 'site' is in recognition of widespread access through non web based Internet technologies such as smartphone apps.*

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE (SNS) *The website through which a social networking application can be accessed.*

SOCIOBIOLOGY *The study of the relationship between an animal's behaviour and it's genetic make-up.*

SOCIOLOGICAL PROPAGANDA *Jaques Ellul's description for ideas or narratives spread prior to the release of a call to action in order to improve the reception of the subsequent 'action based' or 'true' propaganda. (See also pre-propaganda).*

SPAM *Unsolicited communications often commercial and typically sent to a large number of people often via online media.*

SPLASH PAGES *A webpage to which a person is automatically redirected within a website, typically for promotional purposes.*

SPONSORED LINKS *Results to a Google search which appear at the top of the list in their own section to identify them as paid for content.*

CARD STACKING *Selective use of facts.*

STRUCTURAL PROPAGANDA *Propaganda which results from the interplay of economic and political forces, rather than solely through the intentional efforts of a specific propagandist.*

STRUCTURE *Social constructs which can influence human behaviour.*

SWING VOTERS *Likely voters who have not yet decided who to vote for or have historically voted for different parties.*

SYMBOLISM *The use of simple conceptual formations or images to convey complex information.*

TECHNOCENTRICITY *The belief that technology is the sole or primary explanation for a phenomena, or that it should be the central focus of an analysis to the exclusion of other relevant factors.*

TECHNOLOGICALLY DETERMINISTIC *The belief that technology is the principal or only factor in social change.*

TESTIMONIAL *Reflecting the reputation of a person (good or bad) onto a subject you wish to promote or defame.*

THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC INFORMATION *The US government agency also known as the 'Creel Commission' responsible for producing propaganda during World War I.*

THE INTERNET *A worldwide network of computer networks.*

THE INTERNET MEME DATABASE (IMD) *An online database which identifies and catalogues Internet memes via crowd sourcing.*

THE TORIES *An alternative term for the UK Conservative Party.*

THE WORLD WIDE WEB *A subset of the Internet consisting of webpages accessible through a browser.*

THERMOMETER RATING *Thermometer ratings measure the public perception of UK political parties. They are compiled by IPSOS-Mori who ask respondents to rank their approval on a party along a 0 (low) - 10 (high) scale.*

TIME SERIES *A measure of change in quantity over time.*

TOP-DOWN *The distribution of power and information from a central hierarchy to a group of subordinates who are not given the same opportunity to communicate with their leaders.*

TRADITIONAL/TOP-DOWN CENSORSHIP *When a central or co-ordinating authority prevents the proliferation of specific memes.*

TRANSFER *Transferring the prestige of something - e.g. an organisation - to something else (this can also work in reverse with the transfer of notoriety).*

TROLLING *1. In its colloquial form this is aggressive or hostile contributions to an online forum. 2. In its academic form trolling is specifically the intentional derailing of online debate under the guise of genuine engagement - often for the purposes of self-amusement.*

TV DEBATES *The party leaders' debates were frequently referred to as TV or television debates because they were broadcast on television (see leaders' debates).*

TWITTER *A microblogging site which allows people to share links, images and text of up to 140 characters.*

UNCONSCIOUS SELECTION *Natural selection which takes place without any conscious desire from human agents acting as a selection pressure.*

USSR *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.*

VEHICLE *1. The biological term for an organism intended to highlight its relationship to the replicator. 2. A unit which contains and protects a group of replicators.*

VERTICAL *A top-down communications style in which information flows from an authority or hierarchy to a support base or audience.*

GENE'S EYE VIEW *The biological predecessor to the meme's eye view.*

MEME'S EYE VIEW *Taking the perspective of the meme for the purposes of analysis. The meme is endowed with metaphorical agency and presumed to 'seek out' opportunities for replication.*

VIRAL (ONLINE) *Content, usually digital, which replicates quickly throughout a network.*

VIRAL IDEOLOGY *An ideology which spreads epidemically throughout a population due to the incorporation of instructions to copy its constituent memes and react with hostility to oppositional memes, rather than as a consequence of its inherent merits.*

VIRAL MARKETING *Marketing spread, often covertly, through ordinary people, especially through online social networks.*

VIRTUALLY DISTRIBUTED NETWORK *A distributed network which exists within an overarching hierarchical structure such as a Web domain.*

VIRUS 1. (Biology) *A replicator which spreads by hijacking the replicating machinery of other organisms rather than building its own. Often causes illness. 2. A harmful piece of software which spreads throughout digital networks.*

VOODOO POLITICS *The practice of campaigning on an issue then implementing diametrically opposing policies once in office.*

VULGAR SOCIOBIOLOGY *An extreme form of biological determinism which characterises all non-genetic factors as subordinate to genetics with respect to human and animal social development.*

WEB 1.0 *A previous iteration of the Web (prior to the bursting of the 'dot.com bubble' in the 1990s) characterised by less interactivity and user interaction than the current iteration.*

WEB 2.0 *The current iteration of the World Wide Web which is characterised by an increase in user participation and interactivity.*

WEB MEMETICS *A form of Webometric Analysis which measures change over time.*

WEBARCHIVE *A file format attached to the Apple search engine Safari which allows webpages to be stored and retains some of their interactive features.*

WEBOMETRIC ANALYSIS *A family of methodological approaches also known as Webometrics such as Link Analysis for analysing online data.*

WEBOMETRIC ANALYST *A program which uses the search engine Bing to collect data for Webometric analysis.*

WEBPAGE *A single page for a website.*

WEBSITE *A collection of webpages which have a collective title and are often aggregated under a common domain name.*

WIKIPEDIA *An online encyclopaedia updated by members rather than a closed group of experts.*

WMD *Weapons of mass destruction.*

YOUTUBE *A prominent video sharing website and social network.*

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Appendix A: Data Corpus A - List

The following is an index of the full data from Corpus A. The Analytic corpus is comprised of all data for the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties.

Month	Party	Number of Files
March	The British National Party (BNP)	6
	The Conservative Party	22
	The Green Party	5
	The Labour Party	21
	The Liberal Democrat Party	20
	Plaid Cymru	6
	Respect	4
	The Scottish National Party (SNP)	5
	The UK Independence Party (UKIP)	4
April	The British National Party (BNP)	5
	The Conservative Party	41
	The Green Party	5
	The Labour Party	53
	The Liberal Democrat Party	25
	Plaid Cymru	7
	Respect	5
	The Scottish National Party (SNP)	7
	The UK Independence Party (UKIP)	5
May	The British National Party (BNP)	5
	The Conservative Party	11
	The Green Party	5
	The Labour Party	16
	The Liberal Democrat Party	14
	Plaid Cymru	6
	Respect	5
	The Scottish National Party (SNP)	7

	The UK Independence Party (UKIP)	5
Facebook Pages		
March	The Conservative Party	10
	The Labour Party	10
	The Liberal Democrat Party	10
April	The Conservative Party	30
	The Labour Party	32
	The Liberal Democrat Party	31
May	The Conservative Party	14
	The Labour Party	21
	The Liberal Democrat Party	15
YouTube Channel Homepages		
March	The Conservative Party	5
	The Labour Party	5
	The Liberal Democrat Party	5
April	The Conservative Party	23
	The Labour Party	19
	The Liberal Democrat Party	24
May	The Conservative Party	15
	The Labour Party	10
	The Liberal Democrat Party	11
Twitter Feeds and Hashtags		
March	The Conservative Party	11
	The Labour Party	11
	The Liberal Democrat Party	11
	#election2010	8
	#ge2010	9
April	The Conservative Party	20
	The Labour Party	18
	The Liberal Democrat Party	20
	#election2010	20
	#ge2010	19
May	The Conservative Party	12
	The Labour Party	8
	The Liberal Democrat Party	12
	#election2010	11
	#ge2010	11
Total Files		811

Appendix B: Corpus A Full Data - Homepages

The full corpus of data is available in the folder Appendix B – Corpus A Full Data Homepages.

Appendix C: Corpus A Full Data - Facebook

The full corpus of data is available in the folder Appendix C – Corpus A Full Data Facebook.

Appendix D: Corpus A Full Data - YouTube

The full corpus of data is available in the folder Appendix D – Corpus A Full Data YouTube.

Appendix E: Corpus A Full Data - Twitter

The full corpus of data is available in the folder Appendix E – Corpus A Full Data Twitter.

Appendix F: Corpus A - Social Media Data Index - Facebook

Corpus A: Facebook Subscribers			
Date	Labour	Conservatives	Liberal Democrats
17 March 2010	6658	23353	6934
18 March 2010	6972	23516	7069
19 March 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
20 March 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
21 March 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
22 March 2010	7498	25388	7960
23 March 2010	7691	25858	8367
24 March 2010	7842	26142	8619
25 March 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
26 March 2010	8062	26814	8969
27 March 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
28 March 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
29 March 2010	9005	27849	9451
30 March 2010	9269	28398	9696
31 March 2010	9463	28766	9888
01 April 2010	9657	29089	10061
02 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
03 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
04 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
05 April 2010	10531	30347	10867
06 April 2010	12060	31907	11646
07 April 2010	13301	33011	12351
08 April 2010	14717	34423	13390
09 April 2010	15290	35185	13902
10 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
11 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
12 April 2010	File Error	38953	File Error
13 April 2010	18958	40442	17164
14 April 2010	19868	42068	18721
15 April 2010	20799	43914	20275
16 April 2010	22671	46617	28945
17 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
18 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
19 April 2010	25348	50294	43452

20 April 2010	26172	51701	48313
21 April 2010	26748	53741	51340
22 April 2010	27633	57204	56418
23 April 2010	28868	60737	61351
24 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
25 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
26 April 2010	30520	67291	67667
27 April 2010	31021	69250	69445
28 April 2010	31598	71060	71397
29 April 2010	32303	72995	73030
30 April 2010	33253	75334	75194
01 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
02 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
03 May 2010	35639	79619	80264
04 May 2010	36754	81098	File Error
05 May 2010	38450	85047	83980
06 May 2010	File Error	91720	86493
07 May 2010	46218	96915	88182
08 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
09 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
10 May 2010	50548	101386	89959
11 May 2010	52466	103347	90269
12 May 2010	55735	106165	90575
13 May 2010	56805	106800	90643
14 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
15 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
16 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
17 May 2010	58982	108029	90791
18 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data
19 May 2010	59238	108333	90870
20 May 2010	59586	108797	90805

Appendix G: Corpus A - Social Media Index – YouTube

Date	Labour Channel Views	Labour Total Uploads	Labour Subscribers	Conservative Channel Views	Conservative Total Uploads	Conservative Subscribers	Liberal Democrat Channel Views	Liberal Democrat Total Uploads	Liberal Democrat Subscribers
26 March 2010	258,951	1,105,396	2,745	160,728	1,562,726	3,122	91,687	UNAVAILABLE	1,629
27 March 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
28 March 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
29 March 2010	259,469	1,108,392	2,760	163,486	1,577,763	3,167	92,630	UNAVAILABLE	1,650
30 March 2010	259,622	1,109,625	2,766	164,644	1,586,351	3,175	93,025	UNAVAILABLE	1,656
31 March 2010	259,909	1,110,151	2,771	165,791	1,590,212	3,182	93,306	UNAVAILABLE	1,664
01 April 2010	260,077	1,110,151	2,772	166,913	1,590,212	3,186	93,619	UNAVAILABLE	1,671
02 April 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
03 April 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
04 April 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
05 April 2010	260,752	1,117,786	2,794	171,503	1,614,187	3,217	94,541	UNAVAILABLE	1,689
06 April 2010	260,972	1,118,390	2,810	173,073	1,617,706	3,286	94,834	UNAVAILABLE	1,722
07 April 2010	261,415	1,120,365	2,828	180,566	1,632,158	UNAVAILABLE	95,473	UNAVAILABLE	1,744
08 April 2010	261,877	1,121,719	2,839	189,590	1,661,640	UNAVAILABLE	96,164	UNAVAILABLE	1,770
09 April 2010	262,271	1,121,719	2,848	195,500	1,661,640	UNAVAILABLE	96,694	UNAVAILABLE	1,778
10 April 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
11 April 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
12 April 2010	263,712	1,126,804	2,930	207,083	1,732,719	UNAVAILABLE	97,807	UNAVAILABLE	1,821
13 April 2010	267,297	1,163,377	2,982	210,647	1,773,687	UNAVAILABLE	100,691	UNAVAILABLE	1,851
14 April 2010	269,275	1,208,161	3,013	221,906	1,796,513	UNAVAILABLE	102,977	UNAVAILABLE	1,893
15 April 2010	270,353	1,237,200	3,042	245,149	1,847,978	UNAVAILABLE	104,577	UNAVAILABLE	1,928
16 April 2010	271,654	1,247,495	3,076	269,164	1,885,421	UNAVAILABLE	105,677	UNAVAILABLE	2,002
17 April 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
18 April 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
19 April 2010	274,175	1,247,495	3,135	331,083	1,885,421	UNAVAILABLE	110,086	UNAVAILABLE	2,168
20 April 2010	274,816	1,317,078	3,164	341,174	2,000,310	UNAVAILABLE	111,214	UNAVAILABLE	2,261
21 April 2010	275,404	1,333,861	3,184	357,207	2,061,288	UNAVAILABLE	112,665	NO DATA	2,320
22 April 2010	276,208	1,333,861	3,191	373,768	2,061,288	UNAVAILABLE	113,880	UNAVAILABLE	2,399
23 April 2010	276,786	1,333,861	3,199	390,963	2,061,288	UNAVAILABLE	115,403	UNAVAILABLE	2,453
24 April 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
25 April 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
26 April 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	434,461	2,092,535	UNAVAILABLE	118,016	UNAVAILABLE	2,572
27 April 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	452,317	2,092,535	UNAVAILABLE	119,027	UNAVAILABLE	2,623
28 April 2010	279,602	1,425,377	3,271	466,376	2,305,123	UNAVAILABLE	119,948	UNAVAILABLE	2,643
29 April 2010	280,218	1,442,969	3,284	469,718	2,365,693	UNAVAILABLE	120,806	UNAVAILABLE	2,675
30 April 2010	280,741	1,456,992	3,294	472,485	2,391,882	UNAVAILABLE	121,753	UNAVAILABLE	2,726
01 May 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
02 May 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
03 May 2010	281,937	1,482,479	3,313	519,401	2,481,778	UNAVAILABLE	123,942	UNAVAILABLE	2,815
04 May 2010	282,988	1,492,353	3,330	535,182	2,520,046	UNAVAILABLE	124,916	UNAVAILABLE	2,845
05 May 2010	284,192	1,530,697	3,355	550,626	2,584,584	UNAVAILABLE	125,828	UNAVAILABLE	2,888
06 May 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	564,657	2,656,680	UNAVAILABLE	127,197	UNAVAILABLE	2,948
07 May 2010	287,874	1,613,725	3,410	569,776	2,686,680	UNAVAILABLE	128,952	UNAVAILABLE	2,979
08 May 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
09 May 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
10 May 2010	291,158	1,640,612	3,434	578,081	2,882,767	UNAVAILABLE	132,606	UNAVAILABLE	3,023
11 May 2010	291,380	1,647,220	3,440	578,980	2,890,872	UNAVAILABLE	133,027	UNAVAILABLE	3,027
12 May 2010	291,745	1,651,573	3,467	580,131	2,899,539	UNAVAILABLE	133,663	UNAVAILABLE	3,047
13 May 2010	291,745	1,651,573	3,478	580,131	2,899,539	UNAVAILABLE	133,663	UNAVAILABLE	3,052
14 May 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
15 May 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
16 May 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
17 May 2010	292,825	1,684,136	3,497	583,549	2,970,849	UNAVAILABLE	135,439	UNAVAILABLE	3,074
18 May 2010	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA	NO DATA
19 May 2010	292,825	1,684,136	3,501	583,549	2,970,849	UNAVAILABLE	135,439	UNAVAILABLE	3,079

Appendix H: Corpus A - Social Media Index - Twitter

Date	Labour			Conservative			Liberal Democrats		
	Tweets	Followers	Following	Tweets	Followers	Following	Tweets	Followers	Following
15 March 2010	1,534	10,884	11,440	No Data	No Data	No Data	1,095	9,152	8,692
16 March 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
17 March 2010	1,551	10,921	11,502	2,300	21,228	20,387	1,103	9,228	8,971
18 March 2010	1,569	11,033	11,564	2,308	21,276	20,376	1,105	9,273	8,974
19 March 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
20 March 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
21 March 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
22 March 2010	1,599	11,209	11,780	2,340	21,486	20,363	1,118	9,441	9,182
23 March 2010	1,620	11,267	11,846	2,346	21,585	20,387	1,120	9,464	9,213
24 March 2010	1,632	11,321	11,895	2,385	21,674	20,535	1,139	9,522	9,303
25 March 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
26 March 2010	1,655	11,397	12,002	2,395	21,807	20,681	1,144	9,594	9,374
27 March 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
28 March 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
29 March 2010	1,671	11,559	12,155	2,425	21,994	22,107	1,154	9,705	9,521
30 March 2010	1,688	11,615	12,229	2,439	22,060	22,142	1,164	9,838	9,640
31 March 2010	1,701	11,668	12,280	2,452	22,143	22,257	1,169	9,917	9,715
01 April 2010	1,713	11,723	12,344	2,457	22,211	22,361	1,172	9,958	9,754
02 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
03 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
04 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
05 April 2010	1,743	11,925	12,557	2,471	22,525	22,690	1,180	10,156	9,900
06 April 2010	1,760	12,457	12,735	2,483	23,254	23,298	1,187	10,528	10,281
07 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	2,492	23,823	23,907	1,196	10,864	10,663
08 April 2010	1,792	13,064	13,602	2,501	24,306	24,353	1,209	11,169	10,945
09 April 2010	1,797	13,174	13,724	2,506	24,517	24,527	1,216	11,333	11,100
10 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
11 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
12 April 2010	1,815	13,672	14,213	2,525	25,302	25,405	1,240	11,861	11,564
13 April 2010	1,827	13,905	14,471	2,534	25,743	25,792	1,257	12,167	11,886
14 April 2010	1,842	14,082	14,604	2,542	26,021	26,109	1,276	12,531	12,333
15 April 2010	1,851	14,272	14,755	2,546	26,276	26,381	1,283	12,774	12,410
16 April 2010	1,897	14,516	15,018	2,574	26,840	26,996	1,305	13,900	13,571
17 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
18 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
19 April 2010	1,919	14,857	15,398	2,591	27,453	27,651	1,330	15,252	14,944

20 April 2010	1,934	14,931	15,530	2,598	27,651	27,852	1,342	15,733	15,488
21 April 2010	1,943	15,023	15,608	2,604	27,821	27,845	1,345	16,036	15,748
22 April 2010	1,972	15,126	15,715	2,624	28,066	27,846	1,366	16,546	16,185
23 April 2010	1,994	15,253	15,894	2,660	28,375	27,844	1,379	17,045	16,752
24 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
25 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
26 April 2010	2,004	15,475	16,117	2,673	28,793	27,826	1,392	17,696	17,387
27 April 2010	2,016	15,541	16,205	2,684	28,937	27,825	1,397	17,877	17,609
28 April 2010	2,020	15,613	16,278	2,689	29,117	27,818	1,406	18,095	17,849
29 April 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	2,694	29,300	27,812	1,419	18,277	18,035
30 April 2010	2,071	15,857	16,544	2,766	29,601	27,803	1,446	18,586	18,735
01 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
02 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
03 May 2010	2,083	16,092	16,565	2,786	30,000	27,793	1,461	19,116	18,944
04 May 2010	2,089	16,208	16,885	2,798	30,203	27,841	1,465	19,283	19,128
05 May 2010	2,120	16,346	17,014	2,810	30,446	28,014	1,474	19,528	19,277
06 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	2,818	30,779	28,364	1,482	19,879	19,752
07 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	2,924	32,088	29,200	1,487	20,518	20,306
08 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
09 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
10 May 2010	2,144	17,543	16,986	2,927	32,929	30,190	1,489	21,417	21,155
11 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	2,931	34,289	30,577	1,489	21,796	21,706
12 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	2,937	35,765	31,348	1,491	22,284	21,865
13 May 2010	2,182	19,530	16,978	2,937	36,014	31,471	1,492	22,391	22,242
14 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
15 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
16 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
17 May 2010	2,200	19,895	16,967	2,938	36,678	32,383	1,496	22,680	22,423
18 May 2010	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
19 May 2010	2,206	19,968	16,961	2,942	36,813	32,544	1,496	22,713	22,418
20 May 2010	2,224	20,015	16,958	2,945	36,988	32,789	1,499	22,792	21,958

Appendix I: Corpus B – Facebook in Detail

The analytic corpus from Data Corpus B can be found in the Excel file titled Appendix I – Corpus B Facebook Comments and is comprised of the following materials.

Worksheet Title	Data
Labour	Full text, poster names, dates, likes comments and multimedia information for all posts on the Labour Facebook page during the data collection period.
Conservative	Full text, poster names, dates, likes comments and multimedia information for all posts on the Conservative page during the data collection period.
Liberal Democrat	Full text, poster names, dates, likes comments and multimedia information for all posts on the Liberal Democrat Facebook page during the data collection period.
Time Series	Frequency of posts for each party throughout the data collection period.
Ratios	Ratios of Citizen, party and 'other' posts throughout the data collection period.
Pivot Tables	Necessary to calculate ratios for the Liberal Democrat sample due to size.
Frequency	Details the frequency with which individuals posted during the data collection period i.e. the number of people who posted once, the number that posted between 2 and 10 times etc.
Likes and Comments	Percentages and other data for total likes and comments and likes and comments for posts from the political parties.
Party Likes and Comments	Details the number of likes and comments for posts during the data collection period.

Appendix J: Corpus B Facebook in Detail - Full Data

The complete corpus of data for Corpus B can be found in the file Appendix J - Corpus B Facebook in Detail Full Data and is comprised of the following PDF files each of which is a copy of a party Facebook page comprising approximately one month's worth of data.

Month	Party
March	British National Party
	The Conservative Party
	The Green Party
	The Labour Party
	The Liberal Democrats
	Plaid Cymru
	The Scottish National Party
April	British National Party
	The Conservative Party
	The Green Party
	The Labour Party
	The Liberal Democrats
	Plaid Cymru
	The Scottish National Party
May	British National Party
	The Conservative Party
	The Green Party
	The Labour Party
	The Liberal Democrats
	Plaid Cymru
	The Scottish National Party

Appendix K: Mydavidcameron.com Posters

Appendix K provides examples first of the original Conservative Party campaign posters and the variations of this meme available through the website <<http://www.mydavidcameron.com>>.








**Now Gordon
wants £20,000
when you die.**

Don't vote for Labour's new death tax.



**Abandon Hope
All Ye Who
Enter X Here.**

CONSERVATIVE ☐

 We'reOutOfIdeasAlready.com



**We've tried
being positive.**

Now we're going negative.

 MyToryTombstone.com



**R.I.P.
Tory Marketing
Strategy
2009-10**

 septicisle.info



**Thatcherism's
not dead.**

It was just resting.



Economic recovery


**We'll do our best to ruin
it by slashing spending
on public services**



R.I.P. foxes

**For foxes' sake,
don't vote Conservative!**





I've never voted Tory before,
but we need to sort out
the economy.



I've never voted Tory before,
but I like their plans to help
families.

Find out why Julie from Llandudno is voting Tory at conservatives.com/families

 Conservatives




I've never voted Tory before.
I may be working class but I'm not
a f**king idiot.

 mydavidcameron.com



We've never voted Tory before,
but we like their plans to cut
inheritance tax for multi-
millionaires

 Conservatives

 mydavidcameron.com



I've never voted Tory before,
because I'm 7 and I like the Power
Rangers.

Appendix L: Google Trends Data

I Agree with Nick Data:

Web Search Interest Over Time United Kingdom; Apr-May 2010	
Week	I agree with Nick
2010-04-04 - 2010-04-10	0
2010-04-11 - 2010-04-17	61
2010-04-18 - 2010-04-24	100
2010-04-25 - 2010-05-01	28
2010-05-02 - 2010-05-08	24
2010-05-09 - 2010-05-15	14
2010-05-16 - 2010-05-22	0
2010-05-23 - 2010-05-29	0
2010-05-30 - 2010-06-05	0

Top Sub-Regions for I agree with Nick	
Sub-Region	I agree with Nick
England	100
Channel Islands	0
Isle Of Man	0
Northern Ireland	0
Scotland	0
Wales	0

Obama 'Hope' Poster Data:

Please note that for reasons of space the data from 2007 which appears in the chart was removed as it contained no values, the search volume being 0 until 3rd February 2008.

Top regions for Obama hope poster	
Region	Obama hope poster
United States	100
United Kingdom	25

Top cities for Obama hope poster	
City	Obama hope poster
Los Angeles (United States)	100
New York (United States)	69

Top searches for Obama hope poster	
Barack Obama hope	100
Shepard Fairey	100
hope poster generator	100
Obama poster generator	95
Barack Obama poster	90
Obama hope Photoshop	55
Obama hope picture	40
Obama hope posters	40
Obama posters	35
Obama change poster	25
Obama art poster	25

Web Search Interest Over Time	
Worldwide; Jan 2008 - Jan 2013	
Week	Obama hope poster
2008-01-06 - 2008-01-12	0
2008-01-13 - 2008-01-19	0
2008-01-20 - 2008-01-26	0
2008-01-27 - 2008-02-02	0
2008-02-03 - 2008-02-09	7
2008-02-10 - 2008-02-16	8
2008-02-17 - 2008-02-23	4
2008-02-24 - 2008-03-01	6
2008-03-02 - 2008-03-08	3
2008-03-09 - 2008-03-15	6
2008-03-16 - 2008-03-22	3
2008-03-23 - 2008-03-29	5
2008-03-30 - 2008-04-05	3
2008-04-06 - 2008-04-12	4
2008-04-13 - 2008-04-19	4
2008-04-20 - 2008-04-26	5
2008-04-27 - 2008-05-03	3
2008-05-04 - 2008-05-10	4
2008-05-11 - 2008-05-17	5
2008-05-18 - 2008-05-24	6
2008-05-25 - 2008-05-31	2
2008-06-01 - 2008-06-07	5
2008-06-08 - 2008-06-14	5
2008-06-15 - 2008-06-21	4
2008-06-22 - 2008-06-28	3
2008-06-29 - 2008-07-05	4
2008-07-06 - 2008-07-12	3
2008-07-13 - 2008-07-19	4
2008-07-20 - 2008-07-26	4
2008-07-27 - 2008-08-02	3
2008-08-03 - 2008-08-09	5
2008-08-10 - 2008-08-16	4
2008-08-17 - 2008-08-23	2
2008-08-24 - 2008-08-30	11
2008-08-31 - 2008-09-06	9
2008-09-07 - 2008-09-13	6
2008-09-14 - 2008-09-20	8
2008-09-21 - 2008-09-27	8

2008-09-28 - 2008-10-04	12
2008-10-05 - 2008-10-11	18
2008-10-12 - 2008-10-18	21
2008-10-19 - 2008-10-25	25
2008-10-26 - 2008-11-01	28
2008-11-02 - 2008-11-08	100
2008-11-09 - 2008-11-15	44
2008-11-16 - 2008-11-22	15
2008-11-23 - 2008-11-29	13
2008-11-30 - 2008-12-06	10
2008-12-07 - 2008-12-13	11
2008-12-14 - 2008-12-20	12
2008-12-21 - 2008-12-27	7
2008-12-28 - 2009-01-03	8
2009-01-04 - 2009-01-10	11
2009-01-11 - 2009-01-17	25
2009-01-18 - 2009-01-24	91
2009-01-25 - 2009-01-31	33
2009-02-01 - 2009-02-07	43
2009-02-08 - 2009-02-14	36
2009-02-15 - 2009-02-21	17
2009-02-22 - 2009-02-28	32
2009-03-01 - 2009-03-07	16
2009-03-08 - 2009-03-14	14
2009-03-15 - 2009-03-21	11
2009-03-22 - 2009-03-28	9
2009-03-29 - 2009-04-04	8
2009-04-05 - 2009-04-11	9
2009-04-12 - 2009-04-18	8
2009-04-19 - 2009-04-25	6
2009-04-26 - 2009-05-02	8
2009-05-03 - 2009-05-09	8
2009-05-10 - 2009-05-16	5
2009-05-17 - 2009-05-23	6
2009-05-24 - 2009-05-30	5
2009-05-31 - 2009-06-06	5
2009-06-07 - 2009-06-13	5
2009-06-14 - 2009-06-20	4
2009-06-21 - 2009-06-27	5
2009-06-28 - 2009-07-04	4
2009-07-05 - 2009-07-11	9
2009-07-12 - 2009-07-18	6
2009-07-19 - 2009-07-25	5

2009-07-26 - 2009-08-01	6
2009-08-02 - 2009-08-08	10
2009-08-09 - 2009-08-15	5
2009-08-16 - 2009-08-22	6
2009-08-23 - 2009-08-29	4
2009-08-30 - 2009-09-05	5
2009-09-06 - 2009-09-12	5
2009-09-13 - 2009-09-19	5
2009-09-20 - 2009-09-26	7
2009-09-27 - 2009-10-03	4
2009-10-04 - 2009-10-10	6
2009-10-11 - 2009-10-17	9
2009-10-18 - 2009-10-24	13
2009-10-25 - 2009-10-31	5
2009-11-01 - 2009-11-07	4
2009-11-08 - 2009-11-14	5
2009-11-15 - 2009-11-21	6
2009-11-22 - 2009-11-28	4
2009-11-29 - 2009-12-05	5
2009-12-06 - 2009-12-12	6
2009-12-13 - 2009-12-19	6
2009-12-20 - 2009-12-26	4
2009-12-27 - 2010-01-02	4
2010-01-03 - 2010-01-09	3
2010-01-10 - 2010-01-16	4
2010-01-17 - 2010-01-23	5
2010-01-24 - 2010-01-30	6
2010-01-31 - 2010-02-06	4
2010-02-07 - 2010-02-13	5
2010-02-14 - 2010-02-20	6
2010-02-21 - 2010-02-27	5
2010-02-28 - 2010-03-06	4
2010-03-07 - 2010-03-13	4
2010-03-14 - 2010-03-20	5
2010-03-21 - 2010-03-27	4
2010-03-28 - 2010-04-03	5
2010-04-04 - 2010-04-10	4
2010-04-11 - 2010-04-17	4
2010-04-18 - 2010-04-24	4
2010-04-25 - 2010-05-01	6
2010-05-02 - 2010-05-08	8
2010-05-09 - 2010-05-15	6
2010-05-16 - 2010-05-22	6

2010-05-23 - 2010-05-29	5
2010-05-30 - 2010-06-05	3
2010-06-06 - 2010-06-12	4
2010-06-13 - 2010-06-19	3
2010-06-20 - 2010-06-26	3
2010-06-27 - 2010-07-03	3
2010-07-04 - 2010-07-10	3
2010-07-11 - 2010-07-17	3
2010-07-18 - 2010-07-24	3
2010-07-25 - 2010-07-31	2
2010-08-01 - 2010-08-07	2
2010-08-08 - 2010-08-14	2
2010-08-15 - 2010-08-21	3
2010-08-22 - 2010-08-28	3
2010-08-29 - 2010-09-04	4
2010-09-05 - 2010-09-11	4
2010-09-12 - 2010-09-18	3
2010-09-19 - 2010-09-25	5
2010-09-26 - 2010-10-02	6
2010-10-03 - 2010-10-09	4
2010-10-10 - 2010-10-16	4
2010-10-17 - 2010-10-23	4
2010-10-24 - 2010-10-30	4
2010-10-31 - 2010-11-06	6
2010-11-07 - 2010-11-13	3
2010-11-14 - 2010-11-20	3
2010-11-21 - 2010-11-27	3
2010-11-28 - 2010-12-04	4
2010-12-05 - 2010-12-11	5
2010-12-12 - 2010-12-18	4
2010-12-19 - 2010-12-25	2
2010-12-26 - 2011-01-01	2
2011-01-02 - 2011-01-08	3
2011-01-09 - 2011-01-15	3
2011-01-16 - 2011-01-22	4
2011-01-23 - 2011-01-29	3
2011-01-30 - 2011-02-05	3
2011-02-06 - 2011-02-12	2
2011-02-13 - 2011-02-19	4
2011-02-20 - 2011-02-26	4
2011-02-27 - 2011-03-05	3
2011-03-06 - 2011-03-12	5
2011-03-13 - 2011-03-19	3

2011-03-20 - 2011-03-26	3
2011-03-27 - 2011-04-02	2
2011-04-03 - 2011-04-09	4
2011-04-10 - 2011-04-16	4
2011-04-17 - 2011-04-23	4
2011-04-24 - 2011-04-30	4
2011-05-01 - 2011-05-07	4
2011-05-08 - 2011-05-14	5
2011-05-15 - 2011-05-21	4
2011-05-22 - 2011-05-28	4
2011-05-29 - 2011-06-04	4
2011-06-05 - 2011-06-11	3
2011-06-12 - 2011-06-18	3
2011-06-19 - 2011-06-25	3
2011-06-26 - 2011-07-02	3
2011-07-03 - 2011-07-09	3
2011-07-10 - 2011-07-16	3
2011-07-17 - 2011-07-23	3
2011-07-24 - 2011-07-30	4
2011-07-31 - 2011-08-06	3
2011-08-07 - 2011-08-13	3
2011-08-14 - 2011-08-20	3
2011-08-21 - 2011-08-27	3
2011-08-28 - 2011-09-03	4
2011-09-04 - 2011-09-10	4
2011-09-11 - 2011-09-17	4
2011-09-18 - 2011-09-24	3
2011-09-25 - 2011-10-01	4
2011-10-02 - 2011-10-08	5
2011-10-09 - 2011-10-15	5
2011-10-16 - 2011-10-22	4
2011-10-23 - 2011-10-29	4
2011-10-30 - 2011-11-05	5
2011-11-06 - 2011-11-12	4
2011-11-13 - 2011-11-19	5
2011-11-20 - 2011-11-26	4
2011-11-27 - 2011-12-03	4
2011-12-04 - 2011-12-10	4
2011-12-11 - 2011-12-17	5
2011-12-18 - 2011-12-24	3
2011-12-25 - 2011-12-31	2
2012-01-01 - 2012-01-07	4
2012-01-08 - 2012-01-14	4

2012-01-15 - 2012-01-21	4
2012-01-22 - 2012-01-28	4
2012-01-29 - 2012-02-04	4
2012-02-05 - 2012-02-11	5
2012-02-12 - 2012-02-18	5
2012-02-19 - 2012-02-25	6
2012-02-26 - 2012-03-03	5
2012-03-04 - 2012-03-10	9
2012-03-11 - 2012-03-17	7
2012-03-18 - 2012-03-24	7
2012-03-25 - 2012-03-31	7
2012-04-01 - 2012-04-07	6
2012-04-08 - 2012-04-14	6
2012-04-15 - 2012-04-21	4
2012-04-22 - 2012-04-28	6
2012-04-29 - 2012-05-05	6
2012-05-06 - 2012-05-12	8
2012-05-13 - 2012-05-19	7
2012-05-20 - 2012-05-26	5
2012-05-27 - 2012-06-02	4
2012-06-03 - 2012-06-09	4
2012-06-10 - 2012-06-16	4
2012-06-17 - 2012-06-23	4
2012-06-24 - 2012-06-30	4
2012-07-01 - 2012-07-07	2
2012-07-08 - 2012-07-14	3
2012-07-15 - 2012-07-21	4
2012-07-22 - 2012-07-28	3
2012-07-29 - 2012-08-04	3
2012-08-05 - 2012-08-11	4
2012-08-12 - 2012-08-18	4
2012-08-19 - 2012-08-25	5
2012-08-26 - 2012-09-01	7
2012-09-02 - 2012-09-08	17
2012-09-09 - 2012-09-15	11
2012-09-16 - 2012-09-22	7
2012-09-23 - 2012-09-29	7
2012-09-30 - 2012-10-06	8
2012-10-07 - 2012-10-13	7
2012-10-14 - 2012-10-20	9
2012-10-21 - 2012-10-27	9
2012-10-28 - 2012-11-03	10
2012-11-04 - 2012-11-10	18

2012-11-11 - 2012-11-17	8
2012-11-18 - 2012-11-24	4
2012-11-25 - 2012-12-01	6
2012-12-02 - 2012-12-08	6
2012-12-09 - 2012-12-15	5
2012-12-16 - 2012-12-22	4
2012-12-23 - 2012-12-29	3
2012-12-30 - 2013-01-05	3
2013-01-06 - 2013-01-12	3
2013-01-13 - 2013-01-19	3
2013-01-20 - 2013-01-26	5
2013-01-27 - 2013-02-02	3

Appendix M: Internet Usage Data

Percentage of Individuals using the Internet													
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
United Kingdom	26.82	33.48	56.48	64.82	65.61	70.00	68.82	75.09	78.39	83.56	85.00	86.84	87.02
United States	43.08	49.08	58.79	61.70	64.76	67.97	68.93	75.00	74.00	71.00	74.00	77.86	81.03

Per 100 inhabitants										
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014*
Individuals using the Internet										
Developed	50.9	53.5	59.0	61.3	62.9	67.1	70.5	73.1	75.7	78.3
Developing	7.8	9.4	11.9	14.6	17.4	21.2	24.3	27.4	29.9	32.4
World	15.8	17.6	20.6	23.1	25.6	29.4	32.5	35.5	37.9	40.4

Data available from The International Telecommunications Union at < <http://www.itu.int>>

Appendix N: – SPSS Data for Facebook Frequencies

Full SPSS data for Facebook histograms available in the folder Appendix N – SPSS Data for Facebook Frequencies.